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ALCHEMY

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Introduction to Alchemy

Frater Albertus, FRC

Frater Albertus (1911 - 1984) was a long time member of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, the founder of the Paracelsus Research Society, and an eminent Alchemist who, through his many workshops and books, served as a mentor to some of the most important Alchemists of today.

The article below is the Introduction to his book, The Alchemist's Handbook (Manual for Practical Laboratory Alchemy), an invaluable guide for aspiring Alchemists.



What is Alchemy? This is the first and most vital question to be answered before a study of the following pages should be undertaken. This question can be answered to the satisfaction of the inquiring mind, but all careless paging through this book will be to no avail. If the reader has no previous knowledge of Alchemy and, moreover, no knowledge through conscientious study concerning mysticism, occultism, or related subjects, the answer to the above question will have little meaning. What, then, is Alchemy? It is “the raising of vibrations.”

For this reason it is wise not to attempt to experiment with the laboratory outlines that follow. These experiments are only for those who have spent considerable time in spagyric research and who have proven to themselves that an honest endeavor has prevailed and that this same endeavor still motivates their true search for the highest Arcana, the *lapis philosophorum*. As all students of alchemical literature have come to realize that the exact process for the opus magnum has never been completely revealed in simple language or put into print, they will appreciate the fact that here is given a detailed description of the lesser circulation.

In Alchemy there are the lesser and greater circulations. The former pertains to the herbal kingdom and the latter to the most coveted of them all, the mineral (metallic) realm. A correct understanding, and not just knowledge, of the herbal process will open the gate to the great Arcanum. Months and years of experimentation in your alchemical laboratory will prove the truth of this statement. The fact that Alchemy is a life's work will be accepted by those who have spent months and years behind books and retorts. It is this significant fact

which provides our spagyric art with such an armor that no materialist can pierce it. If it were not for the cleansing, purging, and aging of the alchemist-to-be over a great length of time, like the subjectum he is working with, how could it be kept from the profane and the unworthy? Only that which has stood the test of fire has been purified. That there is still a cloak of secrecy covering alchemical processes, and that this must yet remain so will have to be accepted by all aspiring alchemists. For personal greed has no place in Alchemy. The aim of all true Adepts is to help relieve a suffering humankind in its physical and spiritual misery. A non-acceptance of this excludes one automatically from the circle of Adepts.

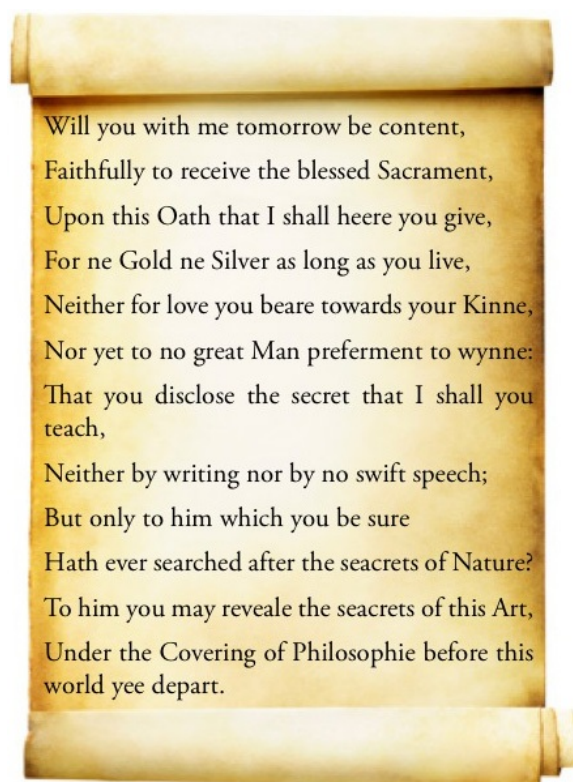
My friends of the medical profession, as well as the pharmaceutical chemists, will readily disagree with me when reading what follows. This must be taken for granted and, in fact, has been so since what is presented here is so foreign to the standardized teachings in present day medical colleges. Since I agree with them, on their terms, it is only fair to ask that they think of the contents of this book in the terms of an alchemist. If this is impossible, then the book should be laid aside for the time being and forgotten until it can be examined by an open mind free from prejudice.

No attempt is being made here to write on allopathic therapeutics. This shall be left to those versed in this particular branch of healing. I am writing here about Alchemy because of the years of studies and experiments that have preceded this book, and because of the work that shall in all likelihood continue to follow. Since the scope of Alchemy is so immense, one earthly incarnation in many, if not most, cases is an insufficient time for the full completion of the work. In climbing the alchemist's ladder, there are many tribulations to consider involving time, money, heartaches—to mention only a few of the difficult steps. The aspirant then should think long and well before undertaking such an ordeal, for if he is not prepared all will prove unsuccessful.

The process in both the lesser and greater circulation is basically not expensive. In fact, it is relatively insignificant. But before this state can be reached much money, time, and effort can and, most likely, will be spent. It is for these reasons that an urgent appeal is made not to venture rashly into Alchemy, not to see oneself sitting in perfect personal health at the end of a rainbow with the world at one's feet and with full pots of glistening gold. These are only illusions and will prove to be but sensational and glamorous *fata morgana*; they will not satisfy the soul. There is more to be gained in Alchemy than vainglory. This, in fact, cannot be obtained in Alchemy. Such vainglory is as far from the true goals of Alchemy as night is from day. This brings us back

to the simple statement made at the beginning of this chapter: “Alchemy is the raising of the vibrations.” He who sees no meaning in this seemingly unimportant sentence has no right to attempt alchemical experimentation. Such a person is like one who claims that since he knows all the letters of the alphabet he can, therefore, read any language as they are all composed of letters from the same alphabet. But does he read with understanding when the letters are interchanged, forming words in different languages? A chemist may know all the formulas and all the abbreviations of chemical terminology, but does she also understand what they really are? Their true origin? Their first state? This we shall leave for those who are concerned to answer. If all the foregoing statements do not discourage the aspirant and make him clap the book shut and put it away with disgust, perhaps then it will help him to find himself in this universe and to give peace and contentment to his soul. Hermetic philosophy, with its practical arcanum, repeats itself over and over again in the ancient axiom: “As above, so below. As below, so above.”

It is questionable whether or not historical references to Alchemists of the past have a place in these pages. There have been so many books published already that have made it their business to elaborate on the history and romance of Alchemy. For this reason, no attempt is being made here to add to the wealth of biographical material supplied by such books. Our emphasis falls, rather, on present-day alchemystical experimentation, conducted in accordance with age-old practices. Our aim in these pages is to attempt to demonstrate and to reveal the truth of Alchemy in contemporary language, while still remaining in harmony with ancient rules and rituals, according to the Alchemist’s Oath. The practice of Alchemy, not only in earlier times but in our own day as well, should be undertaken only with the greatest solemnity. This can best be illustrated by the following oath from *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London, 1652). This oath, in only slightly modified form, is still being used by present day Adepts:



Will you with me tomorrow be content,
Faithfully to receive the blessed Sacrament,
Upon this Oath that I shall heere you give,
For ne Gold ne Silver as long as you live,
Neither for love you beare towards your Kinne,
Nor yet to no great Man preferment to wynde:
That you disclose the secret that I shall you
teach,
Neither by writing nor by no swift speech;
But only to him which you be sure
Hath ever searched after the seacrets of Nature?
To him you may reveale the seacrets of this Art,
Under the Covering of Philosophie before this
world yee depart.

Sooner or later, most students experience a desire to find an Adept in order to become his or her pupil or disciple. But no matter how sincere such a desire is, it is futile for the student to attempt to locate a teacher versed in the Grand Arcanum. "When the pupil is ready, the Master will appear." This ancient precept still holds true. One may search, one may aspire, one may work and study hard until the wee hours of the morning, and yet it will not be evidence that he or she will ever attain that priceless jewel: the Grand Arcanum. For it takes more than mere study. An honest heart, a clean heart, a true heart, a benevolent and contrite heart accomplishes more than all the book learning can ever do. Yet, strangely enough, learning must accompany the virtues just cited. Without a knowledge and an understanding of natural laws and their corresponding spiritual parallels, no one could ever truly be called an Alchemist or a Sage.

I am not attempting to vindicate Alchemy. It needs no vindication. I am advocating the truth in Alchemy, for it is a most wonderful experience to have come to a realization. To experience! To realize! To have found "the light that shined in the darkness."

All the foregoing may seem so discouraging. Perhaps a heavy doubt may weigh upon the heart of the lover of Alchemystical Research. Whatever the cause or whatever its effects may be, a tremendous responsibility is connected

with it. He who has read about the lives of the Alchemists has found that most often many years had to elapse before their goal was reached. Not everyone was as fortunate as Eirenaeus Philalethes who writes that in his 23rd year that great blessing in the form of the *lapis philosophorum* was attained. Many had to await another incarnation before they proved themselves worthy and ready to receive it. But, if all doubts are put aside and if a firm Belief has grown into a strong Faith, then that quickening moment that produces knowledge will eventually help one to come to “Understand,” to “Realize” the oneness of the universe, the secret behind Creation and the unfolding of cosmic consciousness.

This brings us to the natural questions: “What is the secret of creation? And what constitutes life force?” These questions must be answered before the would-be Alchemist can accomplish anything in her laboratory.

Since everything that grows comes from a seed, the fruit must be contained in its seed. Mark this well, for here lies the secret of creation. The raising of specimen, as said before, is the raising of vibrations. Herbs, animals, as well as minerals and metals, grow from seed. To understand this secret of nature, which is only partly revealed to humankind generally, constitutes the main theoretical subject in Alchemy. Once this is known, then only the proper understanding is necessary in order to obtain results in the raising or elevating of specimen, which is nothing else but transmutation. If we can help nature in her ultimate goal, that of bringing her products to perfection, then we are in harmony with her laws. Nature does not resent an artificial effort, or a shortcut, to bring about perfection. To illustrate: the seed of a tomato may be put into the ground late in the fall. Snow and ice may cover it during the winter. But no tomato plant will grow during this time, outdoors in freezing temperatures. However, if the same seed is planted inside where sufficient warmth and moisture is provided, and if it is placed in the proper matrix it will grow into a plant and bear fruit. This is not contrary to nature. It is in harmony with the natural laws. For fire (heat), water, air, and earth are all that are necessary to cause a seed to grow and bear its predestined fruit. The life force originates not in fire, earth, air, and water. This life force is a separate essence which fills the universe. This essence, or fifth essence (quintessence), is the truly important object that alchemists seek. It is the fifth of the four: fire, water, air, and earth, and is the most important one for the alchemist to find and then to separate. After such a separation has taken place, the answer to what lies behind the secret of creation will then manifest itself partly in the form of a dense smoke-like vapor that settles, after passing through the condenser tube, into a water-like substance of a yellowish color carrying with itself something oily which gives the tinge to the extracted water. This oily

substance, or alchemical Sulphur, is just as essential to alchemical preparations as Salt and Essence. I do not wish to go into this any further at this point, as this will be treated more explicitly later on.



A repetition of certain phrases and sentences may be found throughout this book. This is not arbitrary; they have been purposely inserted in order to emphasize certain important points more strongly. Much that is written here must be reread many a time in order to lift the veil. This only can be accomplished individually by each student. That which follows will be discovered when the practical experimentation takes place in the laboratory.

Now to the alchemist's laboratory. This usually takes on a sinister coloring as one's imagination runs wild. Even today, so-called religious people are inclined to discuss Alchemy in rather subdued whispers because, so they claim, it is the devil's work. Ignorance is bliss to some, and no one has a right to take another out of his or her bliss. We must ignore those that have religious scruples against Alchemy, as we do not intend to convert anybody. The aim laid down here is to help the alchemical aspirant on her laborious road. This road begins in the laboratory. Everything in the laboratory revolves around the fire or its emanation: heat. The rest is composed of a few flasks, a condenser, and some ingenuity. It sounds rather simple and really is so. What about all the other instruments that clutter up an alchemist's laboratory, as pictures would have us believe? Just as an artist needs only canvas, paint, and brushes to paint a picture, but may add an indefinite number of other related objects to his studio, so may an alchemist add other related equipment as he sees fit. No doubt he is going to experiment and probe deeper into the mysteries to unlock one after another. Once the soul hungers and thirsts for truth and the unfoldment of nature's laws,

there is no end to its search until the ultimate has been reached.

Where should a laboratory be located? How can one practice Alchemy in a crowded city? Such questions will have to be answered individually by each student. A corner in an attic or a place in the basement is sufficient, as long as there is a continuous source of heat available. He who wishes to practice our spagyric work will have to do all the work himself. How fortunate! How else could it be? How else can one appreciate the experience if he does not arrive at the crucial point of knowledge by his own individual efforts? Enough has been said now concerning the hardships and disappointments that undoubtedly will be encountered. If the student, in spite of these difficulties still wishes to enter the portals of the spagyrist's holy temple, she will find a welcome guide in the following pages. These unfold, in simple language, the process of the lesser circulation.

Those who wait for a complete description, in similar language, of the Grand Arcanum will wait in vain. It cannot be given. It is not permissible. But and this is of utmost significance—he who can accomplish in his laboratory what the following pages present by way of instruction, can surely accomplish the Grand Arcanum, *if he is ready*. The preparation may take years or even tens of years. No time limit can be set. Some have a natural or inherited tendency, or gift, to delve into the mysteries. Some can never even enter. The “why” for this has no place here. But to those who are ready to travel the royal road of Alchemy, I say, “Patience! Patience! Patience! Think and live cleanly and charitably and dwell always in truth—that which you honestly consider and believe to be the truth.” Such a neophyte cannot fail then. Remember, “Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

The wisdom of the Sages represents a culmination of all that is essential for people to have faith in, knowledge of, and understanding about. She who has attained such a state of illumination is indeed in harmony with the universe and at peace with the world. To reach this goal of enlightenment, the struggle in this mundane shell need not be of a violent nature, as some want us to believe; rather it should be a constant alertness to the possibilities that confront us in our daily lives, to raise our thought world above the drudgery of this everyday life, and eventually to find the peace within us. If one has not undergone the Alchemy of the inner self, or transcendental Alchemy, as it has been termed, he will find it extremely difficult to obtain results in his practical laboratory experimentation. He may produce things he knows nothing about, consequently passing them up as worthless. It is not sufficient only to know; it is understanding that crowns our work. It is here the wisdom of the Sages and Adepts helps to bring about an

understanding within the individual concerning that which she knows but does not understand.

In Alchemy there is only one way that leads to results. The aspirant must show his worthiness and his sufficient preparation. This preparation extends over many and varied subjects, but most of all does it concern the search for truth. The living, waking, or conscious state must be immersed in the truthfulness that speaks out of every word and action. There must be a love for humanity that knows no passion, a readiness to gladly share one's entrusted material possessions with others, and a willingness to put the needs of humanity above personal desires. All of these virtues one must acquire first. Only then will the wisdom of the Sages and Adepts begin to make sense. Then Nature will become a willing companion to serve us. The world, as we will then realize it, begins to take on form and shape, whereas previously it enshrouded us in a haze which our vision could not penetrate. We will come to know God. Illumination will enlighten our whole life. It will cease to be a mere fight for an existence, for the Divine will have entered our hearts. Peace profound will dwell within and surround us amidst turmoil and strife. This the wisdom of the Sages will help us to attain. But only our own preparation and proper living will let us obtain it. We must do the work ourselves, for no one can do it for us. We will begin to realize that everything is no longer so individualistic as it seemed before. We is the term in which we will think. We, God and I, humanity and I become entwined. The "I" loses its meaning; it becomes submerged in the Cosmic All. "I" becomes many, as part of many that has its ultimate in one. Individuality, though still existing, becomes "All-individuality." Hence we begin to realize that the "I" is only a segment of the Divine, an entity in itself but not the true self, that which is All, the Divine. The wise ones, Sages, Adepts, or whatever names we may give them, those who have become illuminated, meet on the same plane. They have climbed to the mountain top. Theirs is the mastership over the world below. They can see what happens below and that which will happen because of their far-reaching sight. Those in the valley, twisting and turning and searching behind obstacles are too close to the pattern of events to see it. Sages read Nature as an open book printed in clear type whose sentences they fully understand.



The writing left us by the Sages are typical for the correspondence of their thoughts and explanations. All agree with one another. Only the uninitiated believes he detects inconsistencies and seeming contradictions, due to lack of understanding. Exemplary in its precision and profundity are the seven points dealing with Rosicrucian concepts as given during an extra-curricular lecture to students of The Rose Croix University by the late eminent Sovereign Grand Master of that Order, Thor Kiimaletho. The following is quoted (with his permission) from his lecture, “The Basic Rosicrucian Concept”:

11. The Origin of the Universe is Divine. The Universe is a manifestation of, and an emanation from, the One Absolute Cosmic Being. All manifestations of life are centers of consciousness and expressions of the One Life within the framework of its material limitations. There is but One Life in the Universe—the Universal Life. It saturates and fills all forms, shapes, and manifestations of life.
22. The soul is a spark of the divine consciousness in the Universe. As a drop of water is a part of the ocean and all water, so is the soul manifesting in material expression, a part of the One Soul in the Universe. In the human being it develops the personality and the individual expression.
33. The soul-force possesses potentially the powers of the divine principle at work in the universe. The function of life on earth is to afford the opportunity of developing these potentialities in the personality. Since one incarnation on earth cannot possibly be sufficient, the personality must return again and again in order to achieve the maximum development.

44. The moral law is one of the basic laws of the universe. It is likewise called the principle of Karma, the result of cause and effect, or action and reaction. There is nothing vindictive about this principle. It works impersonally like any law of nature. As the fruit is contained in the seed, so the consequences are inherent in the act. This principle guides the destinies of both people and nations. Knowledge of this principle gives human beings the power to control our own destiny.
55. Life has a purpose. Life is not meaningless. Happiness is a very real thing and is a by-product of knowledge, action, and living.
66. Humans have free choice. We have tremendous powers of both good and evil, depending upon our conscious realizations.
77. Since the individual soul is part of the universal soul, human beings have access to powers we do not know, but which time and knowledge and experience will gradually reveal to us."

Hermetic philosophers have taught the very same fundamentals even as philosophers of the future will do, for that which constitutes truth will remain truth. It cannot be changed. But the theories of humans and their opinions, which are incorrectly given by some as truth, are subject to change. Because one calls oneself a philosopher does not necessarily make one such. One is only a philosopher who has a sincere love for the wisdom that manifests universally and who strives as sincerely to apply it in one's daily life. Wisdom is acquired through righteous living. It is understanding applied. The acquisition of a degree of Doctor of Philosophy, as conferred upon graduates in institutions of higher learning, does not make one a philosopher, as much as those in possession of such a degree may believe in their right to such a title.

To be acquainted with the history of philosophy, the lives and teachings of those called philosophers, is only a study and knowledge of their universal concepts and what has been derived from them. To be a philosopher, therefore, means to understand and live according to that understanding, knowing well that only by giving unhesitatingly and unselfishly will our belief in humankind be justified. When this has been realized, then only will Alchemy become something real. Transmutation always takes place on a higher plane, and in the physical world laws cannot be adhered to or violated without producing karmic manifestations. Beneficial karma, if it is permissible to use a term, because karma is impartial, is brought about by harmonious applications of natural laws. These natural laws must be adhered to if, according to predestined results, we wish to obtain what nature has decreed.

If the foregoing even in its very condensed form has made any sense at all to the student of Alchemy, it must be apparent then why that alchemical gem, which all alchemists desire to produce, has been called the Philosopher's Stone. How often it is that we use words and attach no meaning to them, only because we fail to understand.

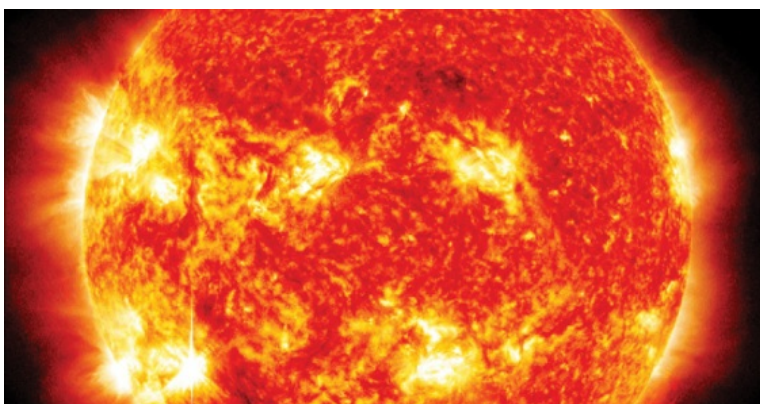


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The Sun Invincible

Timothy J. O'Neill, FRC

In this article, Timothy J. O'Neill, a member of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC's International Research Council, explores the esoteric meaning of the Sun in Alchemy and the Mystery Religions.



The shaman, alchemist, and blacksmith all share one surprising and outstanding characteristic: they are all masters of fire. And each of these fire masters is expert in the art of transformation.

From the awakening of human awareness, it was clear that fire and heat contain the mystery of change, death, and rebirth. That which is burned is often the grounds for new life, as anyone who has watched the process of plant regrowth following a forest fire will understand. It was also apparent to earliest people that the greatest source of fire—that embodied in the Sun—was the origin or basis of all life and being. The warmth of the flesh, the heat of the internal organs, the passion, excitement, and enthusiasm for life, all this was likened to the gentle warmth of the Sun. Thus a subtle or esoteric link between humans and the Sun eventually became part of the traditional teachings of the great philosophical schools. The Sun came to be seen as the localization of the great universal driving force of evolution and life itself.

As one of the great philosophical and mystical traditions, alchemy can be simply defined as the art of accelerating nature's slow and gradual work of universal perfection as exemplified in the process of biological evolution. In our context, it is the solar fire of evolution which speeds alchemy's refined work of

perfection.

As the alchemists quickly learned, though, the unbridled heart of the solar force burns too quickly and intensely by itself. That is why, in the practice of alchemy, the Sun is rarely found apart from its natural companion, the moon, which is characterized by its moist, cooling, vaporous currents. The alchemists often symbolized this hidden unity between the opposites—sun and moon—as a mystical marriage or as the cycle of falling dew and rising moisture. You see, it was believed in antiquity and the Middle Ages that as the heat of the morning sun warmed the cold, wet earth, the rising vapors would circulate and fall as dew. We now know the process to be far more complex. Yet this archetypal cycling of hot and cold, dry and moist, fiery and watery, illustrates perfectly the harmony and balance of Sun and moon to be found at the heart of the alchemical process.

The famous *Mutus Liber* or *Silent Book* illustrates this alchemical process of the circulation of dew in great detail (see Image 1). As the solar and lunar forces act together to accelerate the turning of the wheel of life, so is evolution hastened, ultimately producing the perfected “gold” or purest potential essence of the object or person put through the alchemical process. In the traditions of esoteric alchemy, it was most often the alchemist who was the object of the process, the purpose being spiritual perfection.

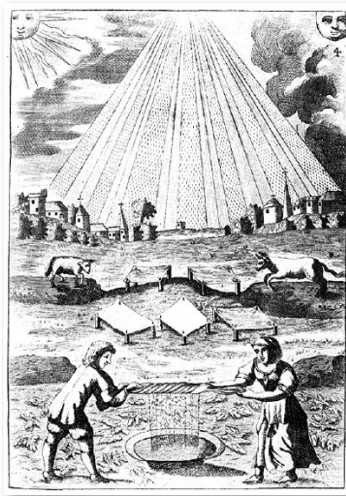


Image 1. The alchemical couple as the lower correspondence to the Sun and moon in the harvesting of the dew, which must occur in the months of April (Aries) and May (Taurus), when according to Kunrath, the green world spirit is at its strongest.

It is important at this point to understand that the alchemists certainly used the actual forces of the physical solar system in their art, but most often they were referring to more subtle etheric forces, apparent only to a highly refined sense of

spiritual perception. The apparent simplicity of the process of solar circulation belies a highly complex and subtle alchemical science operating upon the invisible world of spirit. Our physical Sun is merely the most gross manifested aspect of the concentrated force of life and evolution.

A Vast Philosopher's Stone

There is also a virtual continuum of subtle or “etheric” suns coexisting with the physical Sun at all possible levels of being. The trained alchemist learns to separate these various levels of the invisible body of the sun into their refined components and constituents. Thus, the “Black Sun” represents the fertile solar chaos or the most unorganized and primal level of the evolutionary force. The “Green Sun” represents a more harmonized and healing level of the life-force, and the “Golden Sun” or “Red Sun” represents the pure solar force raised to its highest inherent evolutionary potential. It is at this point in the subtle existence of the Sun that it operates as a vast philosopher's stone, acting as an evolutionary agent for the life-wave of the entire solar system.

The entry of the alchemist into an awareness of this incredibly powerful and profound force in the etheric sun is known in the esoteric traditions as an aspect of the “Golden Dawn” or true spiritual awakening. This experience is perfectly represented in the famous sixteenth century alchemical text *Splendor Solis*, or “Splendor of the Sun,” a work imputed to Solomon Trismosin, supposed instructor of the great Paracelsus. This important esoteric text focuses upon the Sun as the motive force for all transmutation and it traces, in allegorical form, the evolution of the Sun as a philosopher's stone itself.

Of course, this subtle solar force is not only known in the Western tradition. In the East, the evolutionary force is known as *kundalini* or *Baraka* and is also broken down into its solar and lunar aspects. The art of circulating the subtle solar and lunar currents has been reduced to a near mathematical precision in the Eastern traditions as described by Paramahansa Yogananda in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*. In that book, he details this ancient alchemical science in terms of an inner solar system within the human body; a concept equally familiar to the West, as evidenced in the words of the great Doctor, Hermeticist, and Rosicrucian apologist Robert Fludd.



The entire art of Kundalini Yoga in the East involves the careful circulation and harmonization of the fiery solar and cooling lunar currents within the body. These forces are turned around the spinal column in a great circle so as to achieve much the same goal as found in Western esoteric alchemy: the enhanced spiritual evolution of the practitioner through accelerated passage on the wheel of life. Many of the details of the Eastern system are found in the works of Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), particularly in his well-known book, *The Serpent Power*.



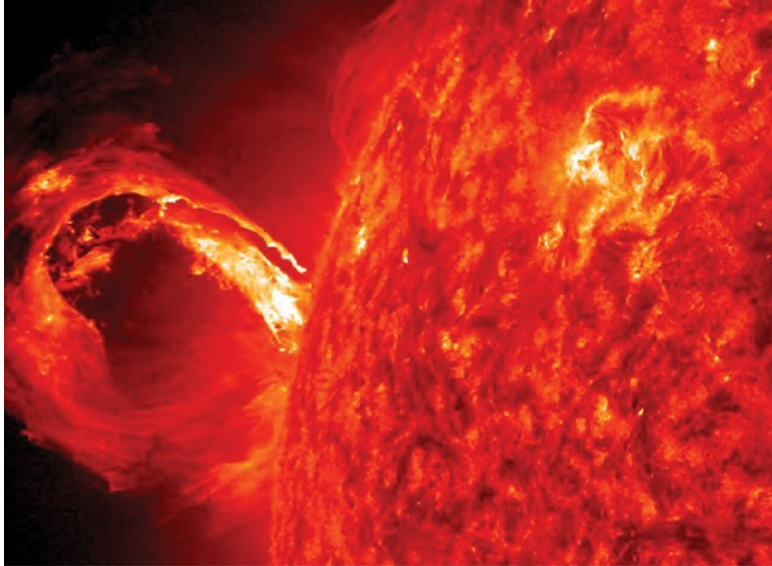
One of the most gripping examples of the incredible power of the solar force is described in Gopi Krishna's classic autobiography, *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man*. As a practicing yogi, he accidentally awoke the full might of the solar force, causing overwhelmingly powerful mental, spiritual, and physical effects. After much travail, he was able to bring the cooling and

mediating lunar current into play and thus balance the “parching quality of the sun.” His experience has much to teach Western alchemical students and provides great insight into the essential nature of the solar force.

Another aspect of the Sun also relates to esoteric alchemy in its work of human evolution. During the Roman Empire, various mystery religions, such as those of Mithras, Aion, and Sol Invictus (The Invincible Sun) treated the Sun as a symbol of the true essence of self, the shining light of consciousness which was to be resurrected out of the darkness of the flesh into the light of spirit by the process of initiation.

As a state of transformation, initiation into the mysteries bears a strong resemblance to an alchemical process. Under this model, we all possess an inner “sun” in the exact center of the body, usually assumed to be in the region of the solar plexus. It is with this inner sun, in conjunction with the actual Sun and stars in the sky that the alchemist most truly performs the science of spiritual perfection, seeking the great universal *Harmonia Mundi* or “harmony of the world.”

Thus, this inner sun is the true “central fire” of the alchemical process, the source of the rising heat which turns the *Rota Mundi*, great wheel of life. This wheel of life is a natural analogue to the globular vessel of the alchemist, the subtle, egg-shaped body or alembic, in which the circulating solar force works its evolutionary magic. Plato describes this in his *Timaeus* as the spherical, androgynous form of the soul. This subtle inner solar system is the true microcosmos or “small universe” which mirrors the outer universe in its mathematical and geometric essence. The Sun, mighty regent of the universe, is the embodiment of the fiery force which drives us through the infinite halls of existence. Alchemy is truly then a solar art—a path of the Sun.



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Paracelsus

Ralph M. Lewis, FRC

Ralph M. Lewis served as the Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC from 1939 to 1987. He was an avid historian and world-traveler. In this article (originally printed in the Rosicrucian Digest in March 1952) he shares his admiration for Philippus Aureolus Paracelsus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus, the Alchemical Genius of the Middle Ages.



There it stood before us—square, boxlike harshly etched against the dull rainy sky. This was the original unit of the old University of Basel. Fondly, Rosicrucians have come to refer to it as a Rosicrucian university. In it the renowned Paracelsus inculcated into his discourses on medical science Rosicrucian metaphysical principles and alchemical terminology. To know something of the life of Philippus Aureolus Paracelsus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, is to know of the early struggles of Light against ignorance and prejudice. It is also to know something about Basel. The old building before which we stood – plain and stark, situated on a vantage point over the Rhine River – was a crucible where a great mind was tested and found to have the sterling qualities of a mystic and humanitarian.

Theophrastus von Hohenheim was born November 14, 1493, near Einsiedeln. His home was near the so-called Devil's Bridge which spanned the Sihl River. At the time of Theophrastus's birth, Columbus had just returned to Spain to make the world-shaking announcement of his discoveries. Theophrastus grew up in a cultural environment, the effects of which stood him in good stead all his life. His father, William, was a physician, a man well versed in philosophy and with a strong inclination toward an inquiry into knowledge. In fact, Paracelsus – we shall call him now by the name by which he is generally known – later said of his father that he was “his first teacher.”

Early in his youth, Paracelsus began his peregrinations. It was customary for young men who sought higher education to travel extensively. It was thought essential to their acquiring of important knowledge. These journeys took the students to the various universities throughout Europe where they tarried a while at each. It was presumed, and not without merit, that the experience of applying

acquired knowledge to the affairs of the day as one journeyed about was the most beneficial. It made life a great laboratory to try out the theories expounded in the universities. It was in the year 1507 when Paracelsus left his father's home. His mode of travel was simple, principally by foot over the rolling hills, through the long valleys, staying a while in little hamlets as well as in the larger cities. He attended the University of Tübingen (from which his father had been graduated) and then successively of Heidelberg, Mainz, Munich, and Vienna – all of this on his first journey. He soon had intercourse with renowned alchemists or spagyrist of the period, whose studies intrigued him and profoundly impressed him.

Paracelsus was greatly disappointed with the scholastic methods of the German universities. He resented their dogmatic attitude which to him seemed to close people's minds to new facts. He further disliked the pompous roles which the professors assumed as learned people among the ignorant. After a brief time at home again, he resumed his peregrinations, and this time for a period of about twelve years! This brought him a variation of fortune. He went to Africa and to the boundaries of Arabia. He was determined that further observation must be made of the circumstances contributing to disease. An intimate association must be had with the people who are suffering to understand the causes of their illness. He believed it necessary to be close to people and to nature; for he held that they constitute the greatest laboratory available for research. The medical practices of the period appeared to him to be stultified by the traditions in which they were steeped. After achieving his doctorate, he was resolved to seek out suffering humanity wherever it might be found.

It is about this time that he acquired the surname, *Paracelsus*. The "Para" is from the Greek, which literally means "over and beyond." The "celsus" was after the Roman patrician, Cornelius Celsus. The latter had written an excellent treatise on medicine, *De Medicina*, which had been rediscovered. Its contents inspired and encouraged young Theophrastus. By adopting the pseudonym, Paracelsus, he believed that he was associating with himself the reminder of an ideal which he wished to attain.

In Spain, Paracelsus consulted some of the eminent Moorish occultists and Islamic mystics who were well versed in the Hermetic philosophy of the ancient East. There is no question that these contacts greatly influenced his *esoteric* writings. His interest in the profound mysteries of human existence, which go beyond the care of his body, was thus heightened. In Paris, he became provoked with the professors of the Sorbonne University. He wrote of these instructors in medicine: "Parisian learned doctors despise all others and yet are nothing but

utter ignoramus themselves; they think their long necks and high judgment rise right unto Heaven.” Also referring to the practices of some of the scholars elsewhere, he said, “They know not what experimentum means, and how experiments are made, neither their origin nor theory.”



The Rosicrucian Portrait of Paracelsus. Note the sword held by Paracelsus. According to legend, Paracelsus kept a miracle material in the end-knob of his sword, which was called Azoth, which was believed to be able to cure every possible disease.

Eventually his travels took him to Russia; there he was much impressed with a visit to Mongolian tribes. He noticed the powerful effects that “faith and imagination” had upon their healing of the sick. Thereupon he wrote an extensive exposition of the subject which, in effect, constitutes an early treatise on hypnotism and psychosomatic medicine. During his peregrinations he was plagued with lice and devised a successful formula for a powder to combat them—it was the first medicine of its kind.

New Remedies Compounded

During the siege of the stronghold of Suleiman II, the great Muslim war lord, by the Knights of Rhodes, Paracelsus took part in helping the sick and wounded. To him it was an excellent clinical opportunity to note the effects of the diseases and to compound new remedies for them. All of this was experimentation which was not being done in the great universities in which he had studied.

His knowledge of alchemy was so thorough that it gave him an advantageous insight into the chemical properties and their effects on the human organism. He wrote many of his formulas in the alchemical symbols commonly employed by the Rosicrucians of later years. These were not understood by other physicians who became suspicious of his methods. The success of his treatments was becoming widespread. This aroused jealousy in his profession, the members of

which exercised strong political influence. In 1525, by their connivance, he was arrested in Salzburg and accused of giving support to rebellious peasants. No evidence was forthcoming and so he was dismissed, but was forced to leave the city.

Still the stories of Paracelsus's fame spread. He visited the home of a girl paralyzed since childhood. After a thorough examination of his young patient, he prescribed a medicine to which he gave the name of Red Lion, an alchemical symbol. To the amazement of her parents, the girl, after a few applications, was able to walk again, and this added to the growing acclaim of his powers. His writings had now become extensive. One of his greatest was *Volumen Paramirum*. In this work, he divided the causes of disease into five general parts as fields for research and study. The first he called *natural*. This pertained to the natural organism itself and what may be inherited. The second division was *environment*, the effects of one's living conditions and associations upon him. The third consisted of the corrupt influence of the *world-soul*. This he delineates as constituting an inharmony with Cosmic forces. The fourth division was *mental discrepancies*, as the hatreds and jealousies which we harbor—or, in other words, psychological causes. The fifth was the *spiritual*, or the violation of the Divine laws.

While in Basel, a prominent personage was stricken. It was the renowned publisher and printer, Johannes Froben, an associate of the great Erasmus. The patient had severe pain in his leg, which physicians could not alleviate. As was the custom, they then suggested amputating the leg. In desperation, the patient called in Paracelsus for consultation. The latter treated and saved the leg. Desiderius Erasmus, famous scholar and theologian from Rotterdam, was in Basel at the time and *witnessed* the treatment. He spoke glowingly of what he had experienced.

This episode caused the Town Council of Basel to invite Paracelsus to become its community physician and to teach at the University of Basel. There were but fifteen medical students when Paracelsus assumed his duties. At the very beginning of his professorship, he expounded his policy of instruction. He would teach principles which “he had acquired through the nature of things, aided by careful reflection...” This, in effect, was a proclamation that he would profit by his long experience of working out among people and from the careful records which he had made of his treatments. He would not abide by the methods and texts which observation had shown him to be obsolete. His further unconventionality was manifest in his giving lectures in the “vulgar” German instead of the traditional Latin. Further, he despised and refused to wear the

ornate robes of his colleagues as being too ostentatious. In fact, he ridiculed their pompous display.

He exposed a noxious practice that has continued even to our times. He demanded that the profit-sharing practice between physicians and apothecaries be discontinued. Though his students increased considerably in number and were highly enthusiastic about his manner of presentation, he incurred the further wrath of the professors of medicine. They caricatured him and challenged his unorthodox methods as being questionable. The persecution reached such proportions that he was forced to flee by night on horseback, the means being provided by a friend, as there was a plot against his life.

During the plague in 1534, Paracelsus entered the old city of Sterzing, which was particularly affected. All who could had fled the terror and death of the city. Nevertheless, he boldly entered, walking down its streets, which were deserted except for the rumbling two-wheeled carts on which bodies were piled high. Without any show of fear, he began treating the afflicted, introducing new medicine and remedial measures. He was successful in helping stop the epidemic. When the city had recovered, it failed to show appreciation for the valiant efforts of this stranger who, at the particular time, was reduced to the state of a pauper. The populace was suspicious of his philosophical doctrines and even feared that his successful treatments constituted an exorcising of some malevolent powers. He was thus expelled and continued his journey and studies. He was maligned not only during his own time but for centuries or until comparatively recently, principally in the histories of his own profession. It is only in the last few years, comparatively speaking, that his profession has not only vindicated him but highly eulogized him and also printed some of his heretofore unpublished manuscripts.

Medicine is not only a science; it is also an art. It does not consist of compounding pills and plasters; it deals with the very processes of life, which must be understood before they may be guided.

Medicine rests upon four pillars – philosophy, astronomy, alchemy, and ethics.

The art of healing comes from nature, not from the physician. Therefore the physician must start from nature, with an open mind.

When we undertake to create something, we establish a new heaven, as it were, and from it the work that we desire to create flows into us... For such is the immensity of human beings.

Paracelsus

The Philosopher's Stone

Dennis William Hauck, Ph.D., FRC

Dennis William Hauck is the Project Curator of the new Alchemy Museum, to be built at Rosicrucian Park in San Jose, California. He is an author and alchemist working to facilitate personal and planetary transformation through the application of the ancient principles of alchemy.

Frater Hauck has translated a number of important alchemy manuscripts dating back to the fourteenth century and has published dozens of books on the subject. He is the founder of the International Alchemy Conference (AlchemyConference.com), an instructor in alchemy (AlchemyStudy.com), and is president of the International Alchemy Guild (AlchemyGuild.org). His websites are AlchemyLab.com and DWHauck.com.

Frater Hauck was a presenter at the "Hidden in Plain Sight" esoteric conference held at Rosicrucian Park. His paper based on that presentation entitled "Materia Prima: The Nature of the First Matter in the Esoteric and Scientific Traditions" can be found in Volume 8 of the Rose+Croix Journal - http://rosecroixjournal.org/issues/2011/articles/vol8_72_88_hauck.pdf.



The Philosopher's Stone was the key to success in alchemy and had many uses. Not only could it instantly transmute any metal into gold, but it was the alkahest or universal solvent, which dissolved every substance immersed in it and immediately extracted its Quintessence or active essence. The Stone was also used in the preparation of the Grand Elixir and *aurum potabile* ("drinkable gold"), remedies that would regenerate the human body. In addition, it was used to restore a plant or animal from its ashes in a process called palingenesis ("retrieval of the soul"). Because the Philosopher's Stone carried the purified life force, it could also be used to create artificial living beings called *homunculi*.

The idea of the Philosopher's Stone originated with Alexandrian and Arabian alchemists and soon captured the imagination of people around the world. By the Middle Ages, the Philosopher's Stone was not only the key to transforming base metals into gold but also held the secret to eternal life and spiritual perfection as well. Since the Stone would turn a corruptible base metal into incorruptible gold, it could similarly transform humans from mortal (corruptible) beings into immortal (incorruptible) beings.

However, it is important to remember that the Stone was not just a philosophical possibility or symbol to alchemists. Both Eastern and Western alchemists believed it was a tangible physical object they could create in their laboratories. The idea probably originated with the observation that some precious metals could be obtained from the ores of base metals. For instance, silver is often obtained from galena, the ore of lead. Also, the preparation of metal alloys and chemicals that imparted the characteristics of gold to other metals suggested there might be a single agent that would perfect any metal.

Another inspiration for the concept of the Philosopher's Stone came from the theory of the Four Elements and the possibility of changing one element into another by manipulating their qualities. For instance, Water (with the qualities of moist and cold) could be turned into Air (steam) by changing its qualities into moist and hot through boiling. Or Water could be turned into Earth (solid ice) by transforming its qualities into cold and dry by freezing.

The Fifth Element and most elevated form of matter was a subtle substance known as the Quintessence. The source of the other elements, the Quintessence was latent in all things and thought to be the substance of heavenly bodies. Paracelsus described it as the "star" in objects, an inner image that gave things their primary shapes and characteristics.

The spiritual significance of the Philosopher's Stone probably originated in the Egyptian belief in the perfection of the soul and the creation of an immortal golden body. The mystical doctrine of the regeneration of the human soul is part of most religions, and the Philosopher's Stone became the physical manifestation of our fundamental desire for perfection. The parallel is most obvious in Christianity, where Christ is the physical embodiment of God who offers us salvation and eternal life. In fact, in the liturgy of the Middle Ages, Christ was sometimes referred to as the *Lapis* or Stone.

Many religious scholars believe the Philosopher's Stone is synonymous with the symbol of the stone found in many spiritual traditions, such as the Old Testament stone that Jacob rests his head upon, the New Testament rock Christ lays as the foundation of the temple, the Holy Grail or cup of Christ, the Yesodic foundation stone of the Kabbalah, and the Cubic Stone of Freemasonry. In some ways, the Philosopher's Stone also resembles the forbidden fruit of Genesis and symbolizes knowledge that human beings are not meant to possess.

The power of the Philosopher's Stone to transform anything lies in its fundamental ability to connect through all levels of Above and Below, spirit and matter, light and darkness. The Stone exists in the formative realm between energy and matter, suspended in the twilight between what exists and what does

not exist. “Receive this Stone which is not a stone,” said the Alexandrian alchemist Zosimos, “a precious thing that has no value, a thing of many shapes that has no shape, this unknown which is known by all.”

In Latin, the Philosopher’s Stone was called the *Lapis Philosophorum* (Stone of the Philosophers) but to the Greeks it was known as the *Chrysopoeia* (the Heart of Gold). It was also referred to as the *Magisterium* (the Magistry), *Spiritus Mundi* (Spirit of the World), as well as “Azoth,” “Alkahest,” “Etherium,” “Universal Medicine,” and “Grand Elixir.”

The eighth century Arabian alchemist Jabir did much to popularize the notion of the Philosopher’s Stone among alchemists. He reasoned that the transmutation of one metal into another could be accomplished by the rearrangement of its basic qualities, and the transformation would be expedited by a magical touchstone made from a hidden etheric substance that is distributed throughout the universe.

The Arabs referred to this agent as *Al-Iksir* (“from the ashes”), because it could be isolated through fire and concentrated in the ashes of substances. *Al-Iksir* is the origin of our word “elixir,” the alchemical medicine believed to prolong life indefinitely and also change metals into gold.

What the Philosopher’s Stone Looked Like

Much has been written about the Philosopher’s Stone, and there are scores of recipes for its preparation. One example is the seventeenth-century *Mutus Liber* (or Silent Book), which is a symbolic instruction manual of fifteen illustrations showing how to concoct the Stone.

Surprisingly, we know quite a bit about what the Philosopher’s Stone looked like. It was dark red in color and resembled a common irregular stone or glass crystal. The material of which the Stone was made was the same red powder of projection so prized by the alchemists. The blood-red color of the Stone was its chief physical characteristic and showed up in many alchemical drawings as the Rosy Cross, the Red King, and the Red Dragon. All these represent the Philosopher’s Stone.





The oldest cipher for the Philosopher's Stone is also the sign for cinnabar. It originated in the Middle Ages and depicts the cross of the elements raised to their highest level. Cinnabar is a naturally occurring mineral that unites sulfur and mercury (mercury sulfide HgS). It often appears as a red stone (above left) or in a beautiful trigonal red crystal that forms on white crystalline dolomite (above right). If you heat the stone in an open fire, drops of pure mercury metal sometimes ooze out from the cracks. The name "cinnabar" probably originated with the Greek philosopher Theophrastus, who was born around 370 BCE.



Another cipher for the Philosopher's Stone looks like the Sign of Solomon. It probably originated in the late Middle Ages and depicts the union of the elements Fire (the upward-pointing triangle) and Water (the downward-pointing triangle). This is the Sacred Marriage in alchemy, the merging of Fire and Water, Below and Above, Masculine and Feminine, the archetypal King and Queen.



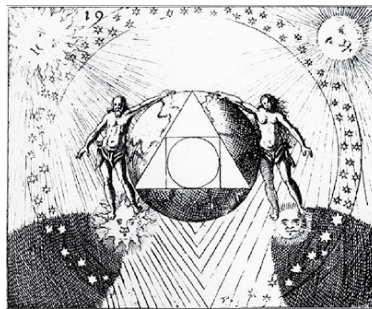
A third cipher for the Philosopher's Stone first appeared in the early Renaissance. It depicts the Squaring of the Circle, which is a formula for the creation of the Stone. The recipe for it was first revealed in the Rosicrucian text *Rosarium* (1550):

Make a circle out of a man and woman. Derive from it a square, and from the square a triangle. Make a circle and you will have the Philosopher's Stone.

This symbol is actually another depiction of the Sacred Marriage in alchemy.



The square is a symbol of masculine consciousness and signifies earth and the Four Elements. It is the four-square mindset of logic and the aggressive energy of spirit. The circle is a symbol of feminine consciousness, the unitary impulse to contain and nurture. It is the all-inclusive mindset of intuition, empathy, and the passive energy of soul. The triangle is the cipher for Fire, which is the agent of transformation in alchemy. In this drawing, the triangle integrates the masculine and feminine energies into a third thing, which the alchemists sometimes referred to as the “Child of the Philosophers.” This is the Quintessence of consciousness that unites the functions of thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition in a new embodiment of body, mind, and soul now fused together in the fire. Finally, human consciousness achieves a divine union with the One Mind of the universe, signified by the greater circle encompassing all.



The Philosopher’s Stone exhibited the peculiar property of having a variable weight. Sometimes it was as heavy as a piece of gold and other times light as a feather. Its primary ingredient was an equally mysterious element known as “carmot.” Carmot may have been a mythological substance, since no mention of it exists outside alchemy, and it does not appear in any list of modern chemical compounds.

However, there is a tradition among French alchemists that the word “carmot” is a secret anagram for “marcot.” Specifically, the process is called “marcottage,” a method of plant propagation in which black soil is tied around a branch stripped of a ring of bark. The new branch that grows is called the marcot.

Interestingly, black dirt has been associated with the First Matter since ancient Egypt. In fact, the word “alchemy” is derived from the Arabic *Al-khemi*, which means “from the black dirt of the Nile delta.” This all seems to imply that the Stone grows from the First Matter that has been raised to a higher level in the Work.

Many reports of the creation of the Philosopher’s Stone exist among Arabian and European alchemists. One of the most credible is from the revered alchemist Albertus Magnus. He reported he had successfully created gold by “transmutation” in the later years of his life. When Magnus died in 1280, the miraculous object was passed on to his student Thomas Aquinas, who is also said to have made many successful transmutations using it.

Another credible report of the creation of the Philosopher’s Stone comes from the sixteenth-century Swiss alchemist Paracelsus. He discovered what he called the “Alkahest,” a single substance from which all the elements (Fire, Water, Air, Earth) were derived. This substance was the chief ingredient he used to create his Philosopher’s Stone. He demonstrated its power by creating a *homunculus* he showed to some of his colleagues.

Preparation of the Philosopher’s Stone

According to alchemical literature, there are two ways to create the Philosopher’s Stone: the “Wet Way” and the “Dry Way.” The Wet Way (or Humid Way) uses natural processes and is more gradual and safer than the Dry Way, which relies on intense heat and powerful chemicals to achieve the Stone in a shorter time.

Even in spiritual alchemy, there is a Wet Way in which natural inspiration builds gradually in the initiate to reach the fervor necessary for personal transformation. And there is a spiritual Dry Way in which the initiate attempts to ascend on a direct path to divine knowledge. The Wet Way works with the “slow, steady fires of nature,” while the Dry Way works with the “raging fires of our lower nature.”

The rapid spiritual ascent of the Dry Way is very dangerous for unprepared initiates and can result in a loss of personal identity or even madness. Tantric alchemists of India follow the direct path by trying to release and control sexual energies, while the Dry path of shamanic alchemy consists of the use of powerful plant allies and psychoactive drugs. There is no doubt that some medieval alchemists made use of such preparations. The alchemists were the first chemists and were very much aware of the psychological and spiritual effects of the plants and compounds with which they worked.

In the laboratory, the Dry Way begins with roasting and heating in an intense

fire that may only last a few hours. The Wet Way begins with slow digestion and putrefaction of the matter that can go on for many months. In both methods, this is known as the Black Phase in which the matter blackened as it was reduced to its basic essences.

The Black Phase gives way to the White Phase in which a purification of the matter takes place and the essences are separated away from any contamination. In the Dry Way, this appears as a white crust formed by dried matter carried by gases bursting in bubbles on the surface of the material. Sometimes the crust puffs up and releases a cloud of white vapor into the flask, which is called the White Eagle. In the Wet Way, a white layer of digesting bacteria forms on top of the putrefied material, which is called the White Swan.

During the ensuing Red Phase, the energies released in the previous operations are captured in a solution or powder. In the Dry Way, this is indicated by the appearance of a red coloring on the surface of the molten material or in the ashes, which is caused by high temperature oxidation-reduction reactions. This was symbolized by the Phoenix rising from the fire.

In the Wet Way, the final phase is sometimes signaled by the appearance of a reddish swirl of oil or pink globules on the surface of the matter. This was symbolized by the Pelican, which sometimes can be observed regurgitating a meal of freshly killed fish for its young. The mother's white breast plumage is often stained with red blood during the feeding process.

The Cipher of the Stone

The most powerful cipher in all of alchemy is a rather odd-looking glyph that looks like a little stick man. It is a symbol of the Philosopher's Stone, and it is said to incorporate some of the powers of the Stone whenever it is drawn. In other words, the cipher is said to carry its own spirit or intelligence, which is evoked every time it is written down or constructed. The name of the cipher is the "Hieroglyphic Monad," and it was created by British Rosicrucian Dr. John Dee.

Dee was a true Renaissance man who achieved world renown as a mathematician, mapmaker, cryptographer, alchemist, magician, philosopher, and astrologer. His library was one of the largest in England with over 4,000 rare texts and manuscripts, and his alchemical laboratory rivaled any in the world at the time.

He entered Cambridge College at the age of 15 and began a five-year regimen of sleeping only four hours a day, so he could devote more time to studying Hermetic philosophy and alchemy. "I was so vehemently bent to study," said

Dee of his time at Cambridge, “that for those years I did inviolably keep this order: only to sleep four hours every night; to allow to meet, eat, and drink two hours every day; and of the other eighteen hours all were spent in my studies and learning.”

Dee grew into an imposing figure with a very commanding presence. Biographer John Aubrey described his physical appearance in his manuscript *Brief Lives* (1693): “He had a very fair, clear, rosey complexion and a long beard as white as milk. He was tall and slender, a very handsome man. He wore a gown like an artist’s frock, with hanging sleeves, and a slit. A mighty good man was he.”

Dee was a close confidant of Queen Elizabeth, who issued him a license to practice alchemy and make gold. As a favor to the Queen, it is said, he “controlled the Elements” and cast a spell on the Spanish Armada by causing bad weather to thwart the invasion of England. He became the model for “Prospero” in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and is also said to have been the inspiration for Goethe’s *Faust*.

With an intense purity of intention and motive, Dee embarked on a systematic plan to discover the Philosopher’s Stone. He viewed it as much a philosophy as a physical object. For Dee, the Stone was “the force behind the evolution of life and the universal binding power which unites minds and souls in a human oneness.” While most alchemists of his time sought the Stone for its ability to transmute base metals into gold, Dee wanted to possess it to transmute his soul into a more perfect state.

Before long, Dee realized that all the powers and characteristics of the Philosopher’s Stone could be represented in one magical symbol. After seven years of intense study and meditation on alchemical symbols, Dee’s efforts crystallized in a clear vision of the Stone. In just thirteen days in January 1564, he completed a step-by-step mathematical proof called the *Monas Hieroglyphica* (The Hieroglyphic Monad).

In his proof, Dee used the ancient ciphers of alchemy as geometric figures and applied Euclidean geometry to reveal their deeper meanings and relationships. Dee said his proof would “revolutionize astronomy, alchemy, mathematics, linguistics, mechanics, music, optics, magic, and adeptship.” He even urged astronomers to stop peering through their telescopes trying to understand the heavens and instead spend their time meditating on his Monad.

Dee believed he had proved the existence of the universal Monad, which according to Pythagoras, was the first thing that came into existence in the universe. It can be described as the One Thing, or the spiritual atom or egg that

gave birth to the whole cosmos. To the Gnostic philosophers, the Monad was the single higher spiritual being (the One Mind) that created all the lesser gods and elemental powers. In Jungian terms, the Monad is the first archetype that contains all the other archetypes. Today, we might look at it as a mega computer that contains all the software of the universe.



In describing the power of Dee's cipher, Hermetic researcher Tobias Churton wrote in *The Gnostics*: "If one can imagine a great ocean of First Matter, then we are seeing the beginning of the universe. If a hand were to, as it were, drop the cipher of the Hieroglyphic Monad into that ocean of infinite potentials, the First Matter would immediately start forming itself into the universe we imagine we know today."

When the alchemists depicted the Monad, they often added the Latin caption *In Hoc Signo Vincas* ("In this sign you will conquer"). All the coded ciphers of the alchemists were thought to be pieces of the Hieroglyphic Monad and, as we shall see in the next section, this is geometrically quite true.

The frontispiece of the Hieroglyphic Monad is a succinct explanation of the cipher itself. It was considered so important in Elizabethan times that it became known around the world as the "Greater Seal of London."

At the center of the frontispiece (shown above) is the Monad cipher within an inverted egg filled with embryonic fluid. This is known as the Hermetic Egg and the fluid is representative of the First Matter. The yolk is depicted as a circle and point at the center of the figure. The circle with a center point is the cipher for gold and the Sun.

The lunar crescent symbol of the Moon intersects the upper part of the yellow yolk of the Sun. Thus the Sun and Moon are united in gold at this level, which represents perfection or the end of the Great Work. Within the frame surrounding the Monad can be found the Four Elements and the Three Essentials

of Sulfur (the Sun on the left pillar), Salt (the Moon on the right pillar), and Mercury (within the center symbol).

At the bottom of the Monad are two rounded lunar crescents or waves representing the Water Element. They come together to form the ram horns of the sign of Aries, which signifies Fire. Aries is the first sign of the zodiac and is associated with the burst of life force in the Spring, at which time the Great Work begins. “To begin the Work of this Monad,” wrote Dee, “the aid of Fire is required.”

The bottom and the top of the cipher are connected by a cross known as the Cross of the Elements. It is here that the workings of manifested reality play out. In this section of the Monad, all the glyphs of the seven planets and their associated metals (Saturn/Lead, Jupiter/Tin, Mars/Iron, Venus/Copper, Mercury/Quicksilver, Moon/Silver, and the Sun/gold) intersect. By tracing the connecting lines and arcs in different ways, one can locate all the symbols of these seven planets and thereby reveal the invisible forces behind Nature.

The merged planetary ciphers are arranged left to right and top to bottom around the Cross of the Elements. According to Dee, by placing the planetary ciphers in their proper relationship, the astronomical symbols are imbued with immortal life,” allowing their coded meaning to be expressed “most eloquently in any tongue and to any nation.” In this arrangement, the Sun is the only symbol that is always the same, and in that sense, incorruptible like gold. No matter which way the Monad is turned – upside down, left to right, right to left, or its mirror image – the cipher of the Sun and gold is always exactly the same.

The heart of the Monad and the one cipher that encompasses all the others is Mercury. In alchemy, Mercury stands for the principle of transformation itself. As can be verified in the geometry of the Monad, Mercury is part of all the metals and elements of alchemy and melds them together as one. Dee embedded the spirit of Mercury at the heart of his master symbol and believed he had successfully captured the essences of the archetypal elements and metals.

Dee stated that his Monad carried the secret of transformation of anything that existed in the universe, but he never spoke of its precise workings publicly. He felt the Monad was much too powerful to share with the uninitiated. His only public summary of the basic operation of the Monad was this cryptic phrase: “The Sun and the Moon of this Monad desire that the Elements in which the tenth proportion will flower, shall be separated, and this is done by the application of Fire.”

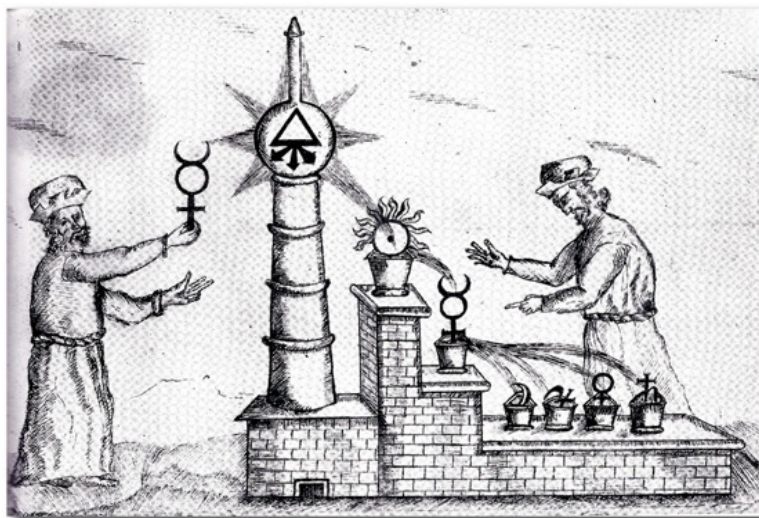
But Dee privately told other alchemists that his symbol described not only the exact interrelationship of the planetary energies but also showed the way to the

transmutation of the metals, as well as the spiritual transformation of the alchemist. His symbol, he told them, was the true Philosopher's Stone.

Dee even wrote a private unpublished book explaining in detail the workings of his Monad for his fellow alchemists. In the inventory list of his massive library was a description of that book. However, Dee's secret book on the Monad was destroyed when a mob of Anglican fundamentalists broke into his home and burned his entire library.

According to Dee, his commentaries on the Monad were not necessary to grasp its power. "He who devotes himself sincerely to these mysteries," he said, "will see clearly that nothing is able to exist without the virtue of our hieroglyphic Monad." But he also gave a strong warning to anyone who would attempt to master his proof:

"Whoever does not understand should either learn or be silent."



This article is taken from The Complete Idiot's Guide to Alchemy (Penguin 2008) by Dennis William Hauck (www.DWHauck.com). A copy of Dee's Hieroglyphic Monad can be downloaded from www.AlchemyStudy.com/public/Monad-Dee.pdf.

Ars Magica

Peter Marshall

In this article Peter Marshall introduces us to Rudolf II (1552-1612) – Holy Roman Emperor, King of Bohemia, Hungary, and Croatia, Archduke of Austria, Habsburg heir, and extraordinary patron of the arts and mysticism. Driven to understand the deepest secrets of nature and the riddle of existence, Rudolf invited to his court an endless stream of genius and established Prague as the artistic and scientific center of Europe at that time.



While Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, the Cabala, and magic were essential elements in the world view of Rudolf's court, alchemy and astrology were the main sciences that shared the same perspective. Alchemy attempted to transform nature by drawing on invisible energies as well as physical means, while astrology assumed that the subtle web of correspondences between heaven and earth ensured that celestial events would influence those on earth. Although they were considered—with magic—part of the “occult” sciences, their higher purpose was to banish the darkness of ignorance and to attain enlightenment through knowledge.

The word alchemy comes from the Coptic word for Egypt *Al Kemia*, meaning the “Black Land,” and alchemy had first emerged in Alexandria in the second century BCE. The Arabs had brought it to Europe during their occupation of Spain and Sicily and the greatest thinkers of the Middle Ages—Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Ramón Lull, and Arnald de Villanova—had all been involved in the pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone.

The Philosopher's Stone was the Holy Grail of the art and science of alchemy. The Philosopher's Stone, the alchemists believed, could not only transmute base metal into gold and offer untold riches but prolong life indefinitely and provide the key to the riddle of the universe. Alchemy was a sacred science, blending mystical religion and philosophy with medicine and chemistry. The alchemists believed in the alchemy of matter as well as the alchemy of spirit: If an alchemist was not spiritually pure, he would never achieve success in his experiments. To discover the Philosopher's Stone was therefore an outward sign of inner enlightenment, the two aspects were inextricable. The alchemists' aim was to attain personal harmony which mirrored the ultimate harmony of the

universe. Moreover, they sought not only the transmutation of metals but the moral and spiritual transformation of humankind. Underlying their obsessive pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone was undoubtedly a drive for harmony and perfection and for the truths of revealed religion. The alchemical dream of the Renaissance was nothing less than a search for the Creator through his created works.¹

Rudolf would have known about the fiery dreams of the alchemists ever since he was a boy. The libraries of his father in Vienna and of his uncle in Madrid were full of the works of the German, Italian, and Spanish alchemists and physicians who wrote and communicated with each other in Latin. Rudolf's quest for miraculous knowledge would have been excited by the imperial court physician and astronomer-astrologer Dr. Tadeáš Hájek of Hájek (Thaddaeus Hagecius). A native of Prague and a master of *ars magica* and occult philosophy, Hájek had been first engaged by his father. He conducted alchemical experiments in his house on the corner of Bethlehem Square in the Old Town and it became the meeting place for many alchemists, physicians, scientists, and scholars. Hájek completed Rudolf's Spanish education by introducing him to the writings of the medieval philosophers Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon (whose works were on the Index forbidden by the Vatican), the infidel physician Avicenna (the "Aristotle of the Arabs"), the alchemist Geber (the "Prince of the Arab Philosophers"), and the works of Paracelsus (the founding father of modern medicine and chemistry). The heady writings of the Spanish alchemist Arnald de Villanova, who was a physician to several Popes and accused of heresy, were not neglected.

Rudolf had an alchemical laboratory built in the Powder Tower set in the northern wall of Prague Castle and invited alchemists from all over Europe to use it. It would have been full of athanors (furnaces), with sooty assistants working the pumps, warming up stills called alembics (after the Arabic *al abiq*) and pelicans (so called because they looked like the bird) as well as the *bain-marie*, named after the Alexandrian alchemist Maria the Jewess who first invented the bath for gentle heating. Rudolf would often call unannounced to see how the experiments were proceeding. He may even have had his own laboratories in the cellar of his summer house in the castle gardens and under his *Kunstkammer* next to his private apartments.

Rudolf was not unusual in his interest in alchemy. Many European princes and kings were fascinated by the subject and accepted its belief in a universal scheme of correspondences. During Rudolf's reign alchemy became the greatest passion of the age in Central Europe and it is not surprising that he should have

been infected along with other nobles and wealthy families. Certainly alchemical literature, both in manuscripts and printed texts, was heavily represented around 1600 in the Bohemian archives. The wealthiest and most powerful Bohemian prince, Vilém Rožmberk, was a fellow adept and accumulated considerable debts supporting an array of alchemists. The Duke of Brunswick, Rudolf's close ally, was also a keen patron of alchemists and an ardent seeker after the Stone.



Rudolf II.

Just as Rudolf's artists used emblems to express their moral and religious allegories, so his alchemists expressed their aspirations through symbols and emblems. Indeed, what Rudolf was trying to achieve in his castle is beautifully evoked by the title of an illustrated book on alchemy by Daniel Stoltzius von Stolzenberg, a late representative of Rudolfine Prague, *A Chemical Pleasure Garden*, "decorated with handsome figures cut in copper, illustrated with poetic paintings and explanations, so that it may not only serve to refresh the eyes and the spirit but arouse at the same time a very deep contemplation of natural things..."² It shows perfectly how at Rudolf's court science and art, reason and imagination, philosophy and religion were inseparable.



Rudolf II painted as Vertumnus, Roman deity of the seasons, by Giuseppe Arcimboldo. Rudolf greatly appreciated the work.

Rudolf also took a keen interest in astrology, a subject which alchemists studied in order to make sure they undertook their experiments at the right Cosmic Time. The terms astronomy and astrology were considered to be interchangeable in the Middle Ages—both were studied by *mathematici*—and they only began to be separated from one another during the late Renaissance. Astrology continued to interpret the meaning of the influence of the moving celestial bodies on life on earth, while astronomy increasingly became concerned with recording and calculating the movements of the heavens as a form of celestial mechanics. Rudolf's parents had had his horoscope cast by the famed Nostradamus in 1565 and he went on to employ many astrologer-astronomers at his court. While he constantly consulted them about his state of health, his prospects, and the state of the empire, they in their turn began to lay down the foundations of modern astronomy.

During the Renaissance, alchemy and astrology were still central to medicine. Alchemy provided medicines and elixirs made from chemicals, minerals, metals, and herbs, while astrology was important both in diagnosis and treatment. The horoscope of a person could indicate their underlying character: if Saturn was prominent in their chart, for instance they would tend to have a saturnine, melancholic tendency. This in turn would help to understand their bodily weaknesses and strengths. In addition, the main organs of the body were associated with different planets, reflecting the ancient Hermetic principles of “as above, so below” and “as within, so without.” Astrology would be able to

tell what planets were having a beneficial or malefic effect on particular organs in the patient. It would also provide the correct timings to take the medicines, according to the most favorable disposition of the planets, so that they could have their maximum effect.

Most physicians still worked within the Aristotelian tradition of the four humours which were associated with the four elements: fire, earth, air and water. Disease was explained in terms of a serious imbalance of the humours in the body. But the followers of the revolutionary Swiss physician, alchemist, and astrologer Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, otherwise known as Paracelsus, were beginning to gain ground, especially in Prague, which during Rudolf's reign became the European capital of Paracelsians.³ In the first half of the century, Paracelsus became the founding father of iatro-chemistry and pharmacy as well as a forerunner of homeopathic medicine. He believed that with his "spagyric art," as he called alchemy (from the Greek word *spao* and *ageiro*, meaning "tear apart and gather together"), he could produce the panacea for all ills; even Erasmus, the greatest humanist of the age, had faith in him. Although influenced by the Cabala and the Hermetic writing, experience was his great mentor.

He insisted that his students throw away their old books and study the "Book of Nature." He broke with tradition by writing in German rather than Latin. He certainly lived up to his "bombastic" name and reputation. He famously said: "What light do you shed, you doctors of Montpellier, Vienna, and Leipzig? About as much light as a Spanish fly on a dysentery stool!" On another occasion, he dismissed a critic as a "wormy and lousy Sophist" and called himself a "Monarch of Arcana."⁴

According to Paracelsus (his name means "Beyond Celsus," the Roman physician), in the beginning was *Iliaster*, a word he derived from the words *Ilias* (Troy) and *astrum* (star). This "Great Mystery" was a kind of "matter-energy" which had condensed to form the heavens and earth. It also gave birth to three main forces—the *tria prima*—that constitute the world, underlay all phenomena and are to be found in all substances. They are salt, sulphur, and mercury, which correspond respectively to the body, soul, and spirit. If the *tria prima* are not in balance, a person will be ill. The physician is therefore an alchemist of the body who seeks to re-establish the natural harmony of health based on the right proportions of the *tria prima*. Nature is always the foundation of medicine because [humans] the microcosm is a quintessence of all creation and of all the forces flowing through the world.

Paracelsus also argued that since All is One and human beings are a

microcosm of the macrocosm there are *astra*—planets—in the body as well as the heavens. The sun for instance rules the heart, the moon the brain, mercury the liver and so on. The task of the physician-astrologer is to restore the natural harmony between the heavenly and the bodily *astra* as well as between the *tria prima*.

Into this royal crucible, with its heady brew of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, the Cabala, magic, alchemy, and astrology, Rudolf welcomed some of the greatest thinkers and scientists of the day. These included the English magus John Dee, the German alchemist Oswald Croll, the Polish alchemist Michael Sendivogius, the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno, the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, and the German mathematician and astronomer Johannes Kepler. Because of the constant threat of persecution from Church and State, such original and subversive thinkers were often obliged to travel around Europe in search of a congenial place to continue their pioneering and potentially heretical work. They were men who were prepared to risk their lives in the search for knowledge wherever it might lead them, and despite their different nationalities, backgrounds, and interests, they shared with Rudolf a readiness to go beyond the boundaries of permissible thought. Each one was, as Galileo addressed Johannes Kepler, a “comrade in the pursuit of truth.”⁵

Rudolf was gripped by the Renaissance drive for knowledge as well as beauty. Indeed, he shared the widespread Renaissance view that the true is beautiful and the beautiful is true. As the world around him threatened to descend into the chaos of religious discord, he hoped to recreate a beautiful world of harmony based on the sacred science of the ancients. Yet for all his belief in miracles and wonders, Rudolf was far from being a relic of a bygone age. He was fascinated by the claims of magic, alchemy, and astrology, but he was also interested in the emerging sciences of chemical medicine and mathematical astronomy.

While their work was rooted in the medieval world view, the late Renaissance thinkers who came to Rudolf’s Prague developed new methods of experimentation and observation which saw the first glimmerings of empiricism and the modern scientific method. Steeped in alchemy, they were the fathers of modern chemistry and medicine; believing in astrology, they created the new astronomy.



Prague.

ENDNOTES

- 1^{[1](#)}. See A.G. Debus, *The Chemical Dream of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 31-2.
- 2^{[2](#)}. Daniel Stoltzius von Stolzenberg, *A Chemical Pleasure-Garden* (Frankfurt, 1624).
- 3^{[3](#)}. See Trevor-Roper, "The Paracelsian Movement," *Renaissance Essays* (London, 1986 p. 181).
- 4^{[4](#)}. In Marsall, *The Philosopher's Stone*, pp. 352, 349.
- 5^{[5](#)}. Galileo Galilei to Johannes Kepler, 4 August 1597, in J. M. Ross and M. M. McLaughlin, eds., *The Portable Renaissance Reader* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 597.

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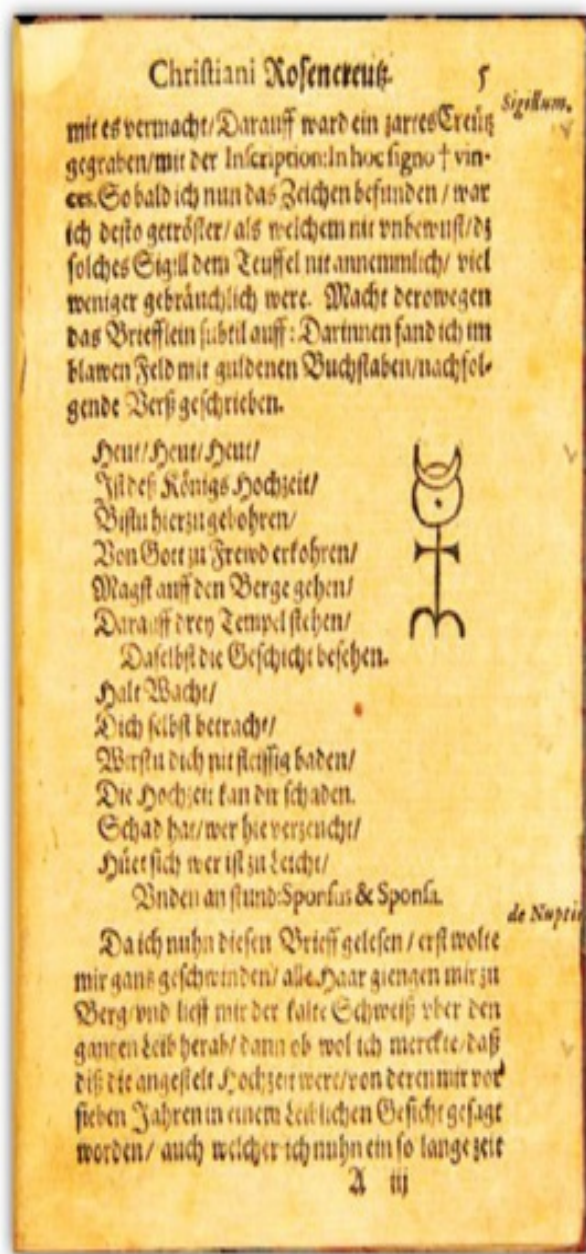
The Chymical Wedding

Christian Rebisse, FRC

In this article, an excerpt from his book Rosicrucian History and Mysteries, Christian Rebisse invites us to the Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz, one of the most important of all Alchemical texts.



Today - today - today
is the Royal Wedding day.
For this you were born,
Chosen by God for joy.
You may ascend the mount
Whereon three temples stand
And see the Thing yourself.
Take heed,
Observe yourself!
If you're not clean enough,
The wedding can work ill.
Perjure here at your peril;
One who is light, beware!
Sponsus and Sponsa.



The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz, a book that is considered to be the third Rosicrucian manifesto, made its appearance in 1616. It was printed in Strasbourg by Lazarus Zetzner, the publisher of *Theatrum chemicum* and numerous other alchemical treatises. This work differs considerably from the first two manifestos [*Fama Fraternitatis* and *Confessio Fraternitatis*]. First of all, although it was likewise published anonymously, it is known that Johann Valentin Andreae was the author. Secondly, it is unusual in form in that it is

presented as an alchemical novel and as an autobiography of Christian Rosenkreuz.

Despite the important development of science during this period, alchemy remained a potent force. It contributed by enriching the thoughts of researchers, prompting Frank Greiner to state: “The invention of the modern world did not arise essentially from the triumph of machinery, but also found some of its ferment in the alembics of goldmakers and extractors of the quintessence.”¹ In the seventeenth century alchemy broadened its perspectives. It claimed to be a unifying science that included medical applications and developed a more spiritual dimension. It also sought to become part of the thinking on the history of Creation, of the tragic cosmogony which brought about not only the fall of humanity, but nature as well. Thus, the alchemist was not only a physician who helped humanity to regenerate itself so as to be reborn to its spiritual condition, but the alchemist was also nature’s physician. As St. Paul pointed out, Creation is in exile and suffering, and it is awaiting its liberation by humanity.² Gerhard Dorn, a follower of Paracelsus, was an individual who was typical of this evolution.³ And it was in this set of circumstances, so rich in published works, that the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz* took its place.

Johann Valentin Andreae

The author of this manifesto, Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), came from an illustrious family of theologians. His grandfather, Jakob Andreae, was one of the authors of the Formula of Concord, an important document in the history of Lutheranism. In recognition of his meritorious services, the Count Palatine Otto Heinrich granted him a coat of arms. Jakob’s design incorporated the cross of St. Andrew, in reference to his family name, with four roses, in deference to Martin Luther, whose armorial bearings depicted a rose. The emblem of Luther may be described thus: in the center is a black cross, bringing to mind mortification and recalling that faith in the crucified Christ leads to redemption. This cross reposes in the center of a red heart, the symbol of life. The latter is placed on a white rose, the sign of joy and peace. The whole is surrounded by a golden ring symbolizing eternal life. It is possible that this emblem was inspired by the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, which were deeply appreciated by Luther. Indeed, in his sermons on the *Song of Songs*, St. Bernard often used the image of the cross united with a flower when describing the marriage of the soul with God.



From childhood, Johann Valentin Andreae was brought up surrounded by alchemy. His father, a pastor in Tübingen [Germany], owned a laboratory, and his cousin, Christophe Welling, was also an enthusiastic follower of this science. Young Johann Valentin followed in his father's footsteps in theological studies. He was a friend of the theologian Johann Arndt, who considered him to be his spiritual son and greatly influenced the youth. Arndt was part of the tradition of Valentin Weigel, a tradition which tried to achieve a synthesis between Rheno-Flemish mysticism, Renaissance Hermeticism, and Paracelsian alchemy. Johann Valentin was also the friend of Tobias Hess, a theologian who pursued Paracelsian medicine and naometry. Devoting himself to this science of "measuring the temple" while at Tübingen, young Andreae assisted his teacher and protector, the theologian Matthias Hafenreffer, by drawing the illustrations for a study on the Temple of Ezekiel. The youthful scholar was likewise intrigued by the mediating role of symbols in the spiritual experience. In this regard he shared the preoccupations of his teacher Johann Arndt, who was noted for his mysticism and who was considered to be one of the precursors of pietism.



The author of the *Chymical Wedding* considered the theater to be a worthwhile means for inducing his contemporaries to ponder serious matters, and some of his works were influenced by the *commedia dell'arte*. This is true in the case of *Turbo*, a play in which Harlequin made his first appearance on the German stage. This play, published in the same year as the *Chymical Wedding*, makes reference to alchemy. This important work would later serve as the model

for Goethe's *Faust*. However, although the author's learning in the Hermetic art is readily apparent,⁴ his view of alchemists is also ironic. Generally speaking, whether in theology or science, what interested Andreae was useful knowledge and not vain speculation. For instance, he and his friend John Amos Comenius helped to revive pedagogy in the seventeenth century. In 1614, he was named suffragen pastor of Vaihingen. Later he became the superintendent in Calw, and then the preacher and counselor at the consistory of Stuttgart. After having held various offices, he ended his career as the abbot of Adelberg, a town where he died in 1654.⁵

Johann Valentin Andreae left an impressive body of work.⁶ It was in 1602-1603, when he was not yet seventeen years old, that he made his first attempts as an author. He wrote two comedies about Esther and Hyacinth, as well as the first version of the *Chymical Wedding*. The protagonist of this novel already went by the name of Christian Rosenkreuz – although this name may only have been added at its publication in 1616. As the manuscript for the first version of this text has disappeared, it is difficult for us to know. However, what we can say for certain is that the symbols of the rose and cross rarely crop up in the novel. We also know that Andreae revamped the text for the 1616 edition. It is intriguing to note that the *Chymical Wedding* was issued in the same year and by the same publisher as *Theca gladii spiritus* (The Sheath of the Glory of the Spirit). This book repeated twenty-eight passages from the *Confessio Fraternitatis*. However, the name of Christian Cosmoxene was substituted for that of Christian Rosenkreuz, and the author did not seem to adhere to all the concepts presented in the first Rosicrucian texts. It is worth recalling that in the year in which the *Fama Fraternitatis* was written, Andreae proposed the creation of a Societas Christiana, a group which, in some respects, resembled the project formulated in the manifestos. Throughout his life, he was constantly creating societies of learning, such as the Tübingen Circle, or organizations of a social character, such as the Foundation of Dyers, which is still in existence today.

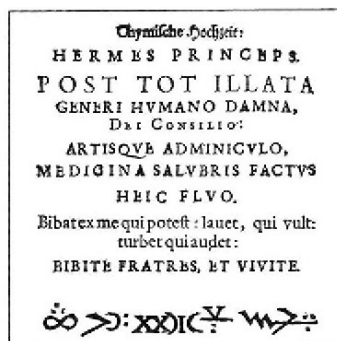
The Story

The third Rosicrucian manifesto differs considerably from the two preceding ones. Briefly, here is the story. Christian Rosenkreuz, an elderly man who is eighty-one years old, describes his adventures over a seven-day period in 1459. After being summoned to a royal wedding by a winged messenger, Christian leaves his retreat, situated on a mountain slope. After various incidents, he arrives at the summit of a high mountain, and then passes through a succession of three gates. Once within, he and the other people who have been invited are

put to a test in which they are weighed on scales. If they are judged virtuous enough, they are allowed to attend the wedding. The select few receive a Golden Fleece⁷ and are presented to the royal family.

After being brought before the royal family, Christian Rosenkreuz describes the presentation of a play. This is followed by a banquet, after which the royal family is decapitated. The coffins containing the corpses are loaded onto seven ships bound for a distant island. Arriving at their destination, they are placed in the Tower of Olympus, a curious seven-story edifice.

For the remainder of the narrative we witness the strange ascent of the guests through the seven stories of the tower. At each level, under the direction of a maiden and an old man, they participate in alchemical operations. They carry out a distillation of the royal skins from which a liquid is obtained that is afterwards transformed into a white egg. From this a bird is hatched that is fattened before being decapitated and reduced to ashes. From the residue, the guests fabricate two human-shaped figurines. These homunculi are fed until they become the size of adults. A final operation communicates to them the spark of life. The two homunculi are none other than the king and the queen who have been restored to life. Shortly afterwards, they welcome their guests into the Order of the Golden Stone, and all return to the castle. However, Christian Rosenkreuz, at the time of his first day in the castle, committed the indiscretion of entering the mausoleum where the sleeping Venus reposes. His inquisitiveness condemns him to become the guardian of the castle. The sentence does not seem to be executed, because the narrative suddenly ends with the return of Christian Rosenkreuz to his cottage. The author leaves us to understand that the hermit, who is eighty-one years old, does not have many more years to live. This last statement seems to contradict the *Fama Ffaternitatis*, which claimed that Christian Rosenkreuz lived to the venerable age of 106. Moreover, other aspects of the narrative depict a Christian Rosenkreuz who is quite at odds with the one presented in the earlier manifestos.



A Baroque Opera

As Bernard Gorceix has remarked, Andreae's work bears the imprint of seventeenth century culture, that of the Baroque, where allegory, fable, and symbol occupy a preeminent place. According to Gorceix, this novel is a significant historical and literary work. It is, in fact, one of the best examples of the emergence of the Baroque in the seventeenth century. The taste for the marvelous and the primacy of ornamentation are quite apparent.⁸ The castle where the wedding takes place is sumptuous, and its gardens reflect the era's interest in parks adorned with fountains and automatons.⁹ They serve to embellish many scenes in the story – most memorably that of the judgment in which the guests, one by one, put themselves in a balance that weighs their virtue. The author also has us witness strange processions of veiled maidens who are barely perturbed by the arrows shot by a rather undisciplined Cupid. Moreover, we encounter such fabulous animals as unicorns, lions, griffins, and the phoenix.

The costumes of the various characters are luxurious, and during the narrative some of them change from black to white and to red, according to the stage of alchemical transmutation in progress. Various feasts and banquets, served by invisible valets, punctuate the narrative. Music, often played by invisible musicians, accompanies the narration. Trumpets and kettledrums mark the changes in scenery or the entrance of characters. The text is sprinkled with poems, and the general plot is interrupted by a play. Nor is humor absent from this alchemical treatise. It manifests at often unexpected moments, as for example in the episode of the judgment (third day), which gives rise to several broad jokes. At the moment when the transmutation is virtually achieved (sixth day), the director of the operations tricks the guests into believing that they are not going to be invited to the final phase of the work. After seeing the effects of the joke, its perpetrator laughs so hard that "his belly was ready to burst." The narrative involves hidden inscriptions and a riddle in ciphers which Leibniz tried to fathom. As can be seen, we are face to face with a literary work of great opulence, and in a style very different from that of the *Fama Fraternitatis* and *Confessio Fraternitatis*.

Inner Alchemy

In 1617, the year following the publication of the *Chymical Wedding*, the alchemist Ratichius Brothoff published *Elucidarius Major*, a book in which he tried to establish the correlations between the seven days of the *Chymical Wedding* and the stages of alchemical work. He acknowledged, however, that Andreae's text is obscure. In more recent years, other authors, such as Richard

Kienast (1926) or Will-Erich Peuchkert (1928), did their best to decipher the mysteries of this text. More recently, Bernard Gorceix, Serge Hutin, and Roland Edighoffer in particular analyzed this work judiciously.¹⁰ The text of the *Chymical Wedding* barely resembles the works of the alchemical corpus. It is not at all a technical treatise, and its object is not to describe the operations in a laboratory. And we should note in passing that the story does not involve developing the Philosopher's Stone, but of producing a couple of homunculi. In regards to the seven days described in the tale, it is essentially at the beginning of the fourth day that alchemical symbology occupies center stage.

Paul Arnold tried to show that the *Chymical Wedding* was simply an adaptation of Canto X of *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser (1594), which describes the Red Cross Knight. Yet his argument is hardly convincing. For his part, Roland Edighoffer showed that Andreae's story bears a striking resemblance to *Clavis totius philosophiae chimisticae*,¹¹ a work by Gerhard Dorn, a follower of Paracelsus. This book was published in 1567, and then included in the first volume of *Theatrum chemicum*, published by Lazarus Zetzner in 1602.¹² In this text, Dorn indicates that the purification carried out on matter by the alchemist should also be accomplished on people. His book presents three characters who typify the different parts of human beings: body, soul, and spirit. While at a crossroads, the three have a discussion regarding what route they should follow so as to reach three castles situated on a mountain. The first of these castles is made of crystal, the second of silver, and the third of diamond. After several adventures and a purification at the Fountain of Love, these characters attain the seven stages which mark the process of the inner regeneration of being. There is a striking resemblance between the basic plot of this story and that of the *Chymical Wedding*.



The Spiritual Wedding

In the epigraph to his book, Andreae indicates that “the mysteries are demeaned when revealed and lose their power when profaned.” Indeed, the initiatic mysteries lose their virtue when they merely pass through the filter of the intellect. Under these circumstances, how can we analyze the work that interests us here without stripping it of its virtues? We do not make the claim that we can reveal all of the arcana, but we feel that three important themes presented in Andreae’s initiatic novel need to be emphasized: the wedding, the mountain of revelation, and the seven stages of the work.

The sacred wedding, the hierogamy, occupies an important place in the ancient mysteries. In Christianity, with St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), this subject was elaborated upon in his commentaries on the *Song of Songs*. In his treatise *On the Love of God*, he described the journey of the soul towards the higher spheres, with the final stage being that of the spiritual marriage. This symbolic system was developed in greater detail by the Rheno-Flemish mystics, notably with the Beguines and Jan van Ruysbroeck, author of *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (1335). Among numerous other authors, such as Valentin Weigel, the theme of the spiritual marriage is associated with that of regeneration and rebirth. Among the latter, alchemical symbolism is added to that of Christianity.

The royal wedding generally occupies an important place in alchemy, and psychologist Carl Jung showed that it was particularly well suited for describing the phases of the process of individuation. The wedding of the king and the queen represent the union of the two polarities of being, the *animus* and the *anima*, leading to the discovery of Self. Jung set forth his research in many

books, of which the most representative is *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944). However, it was in *Mysterium Coniunctidnis, An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy* (1955-56), that Jung's investigations are thought to have reached their greatest development. In this work, the *Chymical Wedding* of Christian Rosenkreuz is a key element in his thinking. Contrary to what the title suggests, Andreae's narrative does not speak of a wedding. The marriage ceremony is not described in the novel, but rather its action revolves around the resurrection of a king and a queen. As with St. Bernard and the mystics of previous eras, it is the wedding of being, understood as a regeneration that Andreae refers to in his book.

The Castle of the Soul

The wedding location is on a mountain. In traditional symbology, this place, the point where the earth and sky touch, is the abode of the deities and of revelation. As has been so well demonstrated by Marie-Madeleine Davy in *La Montagne et sa symbolique* (The Mountain and its Symbolism),¹³ when a person determines to climb the mountain, he or she sets out on the quest for self and embarks on the ascent toward the absolute. The invitation brought to Christian Rosenkreuz indicates that he must reach the summit of a mountain crowned by three temples. However, in the following episode of the narrative, castles are mentioned instead.

Christian Rosenkreuz passes through two portals and arrives at the castle where preparations for the great transmutation are taking place. Then, it is in a third place, in a tower situated on an island, that the Great Work is accomplished. We find here the theme of the castle of the soul spoken of by Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and Theresa of Avila (1515-1582). For them, the quest of the soul is often presented as the conquest of a castle. Alchemical texts combine the two elements in describing a castle on a mountain. We previously observed that Gerhard Dorn spoke of three castles on a high mountain. Whether mountain, castle, temple, or tower, all of these symbolic elements in our narrative are meant to conjure up the notion of a journey and an ascent.



Yet the temple or castle situated on a high mountain also has an eschatological aspect by recalling the temple to come which Ezekiel spoke of in his visions. After the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, the Jews were deported to Babylon, and it is then that Ezekiel prophesied the vision of the future temple. He drew a parallel between the exile of the Jews and the expulsion of humanity from Paradise. This destruction of the temple brought about the retreat of God from Creation, God then becoming the only “place” where humans could worship. However, Ezekiel announced the establishment of a new temple, a third, which would coincide with the restoration of Creation. The prophet described this as being situated on a “high mountain,” and he declared that the archetype of this temple existed previously in the superterrestrial world. This vision greatly influenced the Essenes and was the source of all apocalyptic literature.¹⁴ We are reminded of the importance of the vision of Ezekiel’s temple in Simon Studion’s *Naometria*, and, as previously mentioned, we know that Andreae also had the opportunity to work on this subject with Matthias Hafenreffer (see above, “Johann Valentin Andreae”). Moreover, as Roland Edighoffer has shown, the *Chymical Wedding* includes many eschatological aspects. It is surprising to note that we will soon encounter this idea of an eschatological temple with Robert Fludd. For him, the mountain on which the temple is erected is none other than that of initiation.

The Seven Stages

In the *Chymical Wedding*, the number seven plays a fundamental role. The action unfolds over seven days; seven virgins, seven weights, seven ships are described; and the final transmutation takes place in an athanor which sits enthroned in a seven-story tower. Although this may not always be the case, alchemists generally divide the process of the elaboration of the Great Work into seven phases. Gerhard Dorn talks about the seven degrees of the work. Here we encounter a fundamental theme which is far from being unique to alchemy. As Professor Ioan P. Couliano has shown, the theory which states that the process of the elevation of the soul encompasses seven stages is found in numerous traditions.¹⁵ His researches indicate that according to a Greek tradition also found in Dante, Marsilio Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola, these ascents toward ecstasy are accomplished through the seven planetary spheres. Couliano also noted another form of ascent following a tradition dating back to Babylonia, and which later passed into Jewish and Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature, as well as Islam. Without making reference to the planets, it also speaks of seven stages to spiritual ecstasy.

This element is also found in Hermeticism. The *Poemandres*, the first treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, after having touched upon the cosmogony and the fall of humanity, speaks of the seven stages of the soul's ascent through the framework of the spheres. It describes the seven zones that the soul, after the dissolution of the material body, must pass through so as to purge the self of its defects and illusion before ascending toward the Father.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the tenth treatise, which provides a summary of the Hermetic teachings, reconsiders the ascent toward the Divine by defining it as the "ascent toward Olympus." Is it not striking that, in the *Chymical Wedding*, the tower where the seven alchemical phases are accomplished is appropriately called the Tower of Olympus?

The Seven Days of the Wedding

1st Day, Preparation for the Departure:

The heavenly invitation – The prisoners of the tower – The departure of Christian Rosenkreuz for the wedding.

2nd Day, Journey to the Castle:

The crossroads of the four paths – The arrival at the castle and the passage through the three gates – The banquet at the castle – The dream.

3rd Day, The Judgment:

The judgment of the unworthy guests – The bestowal of the Golden Fleece on the chosen – The execution of judgment – The visit to the castle – The weighing

ceremony.

4th Day, The Blood Wedding:

The fountain of Hermes – The bestowal of a second Golden Fleece – Presentation to the six royal personages – The theatrical presentation – The execution of the royal family – The departure of the coffins on seven ships.

5th Day, The Sea Voyage: The mausoleum of Venus – The false interment of the royal personages – The sea voyage – The arrival on the island – The seven-story tower – The laboratory.

6th Day, The Seven Phases of Resurrection:

The drawing of lots – The ceremony around the fountain and cauldron – The suspended globe – The white egg – The birth of the bird – The decapitation and incineration of the bird – The circular furnace – The fabrication of two figurines from ashes – The spark of life – The awakening of the royal couple.

7th Day, The Return of Christian Rosenkreuz:

The Knights of the Golden Stone – The return by ship – The punishment inflicted on Christian Rosenkreuz – His return home after his pardon.

This septenary concept is also found in the Christian tradition, notably with St. Bernard, who was highly admired by Andreae. The dream recounted on the first day of the *Chymical Wedding* derives its theme from St. Bernard's sermon for the fifth Sunday after Pentecost. In this dream, Christian Rosenkreuz is locked away in a tower in the company of other people. Moreover, the tools which the wedding guests receive for going from one floor to another in the Tower of Olympus (sixth day)—a rope, ladder, or wings are taken from the symbology of St. Bernard.

We find reference to the seven stages of the inner life among two individuals praised by Andreae. The first, Stephan Praetorius, the pastor of Salzwedel, speaks of “*justificatio, santificatio, contemplatio, applicatio, devotio, continentia, beneficentia*.” The second person is Philip Nicolai (1556-1608), a pioneer of the “new piety,” who, when speaking of the mystic wedding, describes the seven phases which mark the regeneration of the soul (*The Mirror of the Joys of Eternal Life*, 1599).

Knight of the Golden Stone

At the end of the seventh day of the *Chymical Wedding*, Christian Rosenkreuz is dubbed “Knight of the Golden Stone.” This title gives him mastery over ignorance, poverty, and illness. Each knight takes an oath in promising to dedicate the Order to God and his servant, Nature. In effect, as Johann Valentin

Andreae indicates, “Art serves Nature” and the alchemist participates as much to his own restoration as that of nature. In a register, Christian Rosenkreuz inscribed these words: “The highest knowledge is that we know nothing.” This phrase refers to the “learned ignorance” preached by Nicholas of Cusa (1404-1464). The latter, part of a tradition including Proclus, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Eckhart, opposed rationalistic logic. “Learned ignorance” does not consist of, as often thought, the rejection of knowledge, but the recognition that the world, being infinite, cannot be the object of complete knowledge. Nicholas of Cusa advocated a gnosis, an illuminating knowledge, one capable of surpassing the world of appearances by understanding the coincidence of opposites.

In conclusion, the *Chymical Wedding* of Christian Rosenkreuz is an initiatic narrative, that of a person’s quest on the way to the marriage with one’s soul. This ascent of the soul is part of a process encompassing both humanity and nature. When reading the book, we are struck by the richness of the language which testifies to the erudition of its author. Indeed, it would take an entire volume to point out all of the references to mythology, literature, theology, and esotericism. We have only made a brief sketch here of this marvelous story. Rather than explain its various meanings, our primary aim has been to motivate you to read or reread this work that is fundamental to the Rosicrucian tradition and occupies a prominent place in the history of European literature.

ENDNOTES

1. *Aspects de la tradition alchimique au XVII^e siecle*, acts of the international conference of the university of Reims-Champagne-Ardenne on 28-29 November 1996, under the direction of Frank Greiner, *Chrysopoeia* (Paris: Arch 1998) p. 11.
2. Romans 8:19-22.
3. Bernard Gorceix, *Alchimie* (Paris: Fayard, 1980).
4. We find here numerous references to *Lexicon Alchemiae* by Martin Rulland (1612). English edition: *A Lexicon of Alchemy*, by Martin Ruland the Elder. A. E. Waite, translator (London: J. M. Watkins, 1964).
5. Roland Edighoffer, *Rose-Croix et societe ideale selon Johann Valentin Andreae*, vols. I and II (Paris: Arma Artis, 1982 and 1987).
6. Edighoffer, *Rose-Croix et societe ideale...*, *ibid.*, vol II., brings together his entire bibliography: books, translations, editions, correspondence, and manuscripts, pp. 761-781.

77. The Golden Fleece is a symbol which designated the Great Work. A fascinating work regarding this subject was written by Antoine Faivre, *Toison d'or et Alchimie* (Paris: Arche 1990). English edition: *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).
88. Bernard Gorceix, *La Bible des Rose-Croix*, introduction (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970) pp. XXXVIII.
99. Regarding this subject, see the work of Salomon de Caus, *Hortus Palatinus* (1620) and in particular the reissue of *Le Jardin Palatin* (Paris: Éd. du Moniteur, 1990), with a postscript by Michel Conan which places S. de Caus in the Rosicrucian movement of Heidelberg.
1010. We will not mention here the rather fanciful commentaries of numerous other authors.
1111. Roland Edighoffer, *Les Rose-Croix et la crise de conscience européenne au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Dervy, 1999) pp. 282-302.
1212. See Marie-Louise von Franz, who, in *Alchimie et imagination active* (La Fontaine de Pierre, 1978) provides numerous excerpts of this text. English edition: *Alchemical Active Imagination*. Rev. ed. (Boston Shambhala, 1997).
1313. Paris: Albin Michel, 1996.
1414. This idea was developed by Shozo Fujita, *The Temple Theology of the Qumran Sect and the Book of Ezekiel: Their Relationship to Jewish Literature of the Last Two Centuries B.C.* (Ann Arbor: UMI, Bell & Howell, 1970). (Princeton Thesis, 1970). Henry Cordin summarized it in a chapter of his book *Temple et Contemplation* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980) pp. 307-422. English edition: *Temple and Contemplation*. Philip Sherrard and Liadain Sherrard, translators (London: KPI in association with Islamic Publications, 1986).
1515. See his book (*Experience de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1984), with a preface by Mircea Eliade.
1616. See *Hermes Trismegiste, I, Poimandres* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1991) pp. 15-16. English edition: *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation*, with notes and introduction by Brian P. Copenhaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Michael Maier's Maria Prophetissa

Peter Bindon, FRC

Peter Bindon is a professional anthropologist and botanist. He has served on the Editorial Board of the Rose+Croix Journal (www.rosecroixjournal.org) for many years and is a frequent contributor to the Rosicrucian Digest. He was a presenter at the "Hidden in Plain Sight" Esoteric conference held at Rosicrucian Park, where he presented a paper on "Ancient Alchemical Diagrams: Are they Mirrors of the Human Soul for the Modern World?" He recently retired as Grand Master of the English Grand Lodge for Australia, Asia, and New Zealand after many years of service in that position.

In this article Frater Bindon introduces us to Maria Prophetissa and the symbolism of this image from the frontispiece of Michael Maier's Symbola Aurae Mensae, published in 1617.



Some modern writers who comment on ancient alchemical texts have divided the existing works into two groups. On one side, they place the books written by the symbolical alchemists who were natural philosophers interested in and moved by the wonders of the natural world. In the other group are placed the works of the delightfully named "puffers" who labored without success to turn base metals into gold. The latter group was interested only in the acquisition of

material wealth, while the former were content with acquiring an understanding of their place within creation. This is still the case today. There are those seeking to understand the complexity of living in a material world while continuing to advance their spiritual and mystical growth. They see sufficiency and contentment as their primary goals. Others see prosperity and satisfaction solely in terms of material wealth alone. This interpretation has the same deficiency as that used to categorize the alchemists of former times, for there are many groups between the two extremes. It is too simplistic to divide all the possibilities within the human condition into only two categories, just as it is almost impossible to classify accurately all the varied approaches made to alchemical practices that have occurred throughout history. Is this why it is so difficult to make sense of alchemical writings, which should be the foundation of what we now call chemistry, which after all, is a very precise science? The answer lies in the complexity of the subject.

For each element depicted in alchemical mandalas and mentioned in formulas, there are numerous pictorial synonyms. Making a list of these is relatively elementary, but then the inquisitive searcher discovers that each symbol has not just one, but numerous meanings. The problem becomes one of attaching the appropriate meaning to each symbol on our list. Classifying the way in which individuals interpret symbols has always been difficult, as those of you who have read the works of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell will have found. Happily, each alchemist of former times generally chose to use just one or two of the combinations of symbol and meaning, making our task of classifying them and unraveling their symbolism somewhat easier. Nevertheless there are numerous interpretations that can be made of alchemical diagrams.

Maria Prophetissa, is also known as the sister of Moses, and by other names, but is better understood by Rosicrucians as the Maria of the Gnostic tradition. She is reputed to have written a treatise titled *Practica Mariae Prophetessae in artem alchemicam* although this work may actually have an Arabic origin. It was consulted by a number of alchemists including Michael Maier. The illustration formed the frontispiece of his *Symbola Aerae Mensae*, published in 1617. In the illustration, Maria points towards the seedling that has fallen on the top of the Cosmic Mountain. The effort required to ascend the mountain perhaps gave the ancients the inspiration to equate this feature with the furnace in which was confined the energy required to complete the alchemical process of transformation. The summit of the mountain is the location of the Philosopher's Stone. On the Cosmic Mountain, the seed has sprung into life and produced five flowers, symbolic of the renewal of life in the appropriate season of the year. We

will examine the flower itself later in this article when we extend the allegory of these symbols. For the moment, let us consider why there are five flowers. Five is the number of humanity, and this diagram symbolizes an activity of renewal recommended by the original author. Why is five the number of humanity? You will understand why if you can recall a remarkable sketch by Leonardo da Vinci in which a human figure is inscribed inside a circle that is touched in five places by the head, the hands, and the feet. The five digits of the hands and feet emphasize this symbolic attribution of the number five, as do the five senses. The five-petaled rose placed in the center of the four-armed cross was for the Hermeticists, the symbol of quintessence, something that was above the four primal elements on the arms of the cross. For some mystical philosophers, the number five had a sinister or even evil meaning, although this interpretation is not necessarily that of the alchemists. This notion has generally derived from a Kabbalistic interpretation, which can be shown to relate to the five days of emptiness needed by the ancient Egyptians to synchronize their year of 360 days with the solar year of closer to 365 days. Rosicrucian interpretations of this illustration see the two urns as symbolic of air and earth respectively, two of the primal elements in which all that is created has its origins. As the two elements mingle and unite, illustrating the principle of “as above, so below,” Maria intones one of the alchemical principles regarding unity and duality: “One becomes two, two becomes three, and out of the third comes the One that is the fourth.” In the magical-religious terms of alchemy, this saying can be interpreted in a number of ways reiterating Biblical creation.

I will leave this interpretation up to each individual reader to produce simply observing that in the Rosicrucian systems of number symbolism, the even numbers are considered feminine and the odd numbers masculine. In the arcane language of alchemy, there is another level of meaning that we will now pursue. Maria Prophetissa is concerned with the combination of two aspects of the one special substance. She says: “Take gum from Spain, white gum and red gum, and join them in true marriage, gum with gum.” What can this mean? There is a hint to how we might interpret her words in the colors of the substance she mentions. These refer to the alchemical White Queen and Red King. In addition, the alchemical symbol for gum is a strange combination of two small letters formed like the modern letter “g” in our alphabet, written side-by-side and joined by a small cross from which is suspended a tiny triangle. This symbol emphasizes the alchemical process that we must become involved with if we are going to decode the illustration. The allegorical meaning hidden in the drawing is further reinforced by the shape formed by the clouds of vapor emerging from

the two vases. This can be interpreted as the union of the two equilateral triangles, one with its apex pointing heavenwards, the other apex pointing towards Earth. The upper triangle represents fire, the masculine active element, while the lower one refers to water, the feminine and nurturing aspect. When the alchemist is able to achieve the correct conjunction of these two primal elements, they give rise to the color red, symbolized by the alchemical rose, which is revealed to us as the two streams of white vapor part in their double triangular shape. In some illustrations of this process, the rose that is produced has an outer row of red petals and an inner row of white ones, but in this case, the white aspect is symbolized by the vapors that stream out of each urn towards its opposite. The red rose was the alchemical symbol of successful completion of the “great work” which ultimately produced the Stone of the Philosophers, and it is partly because of this symbol of completion that the rose that adorns the Rosicrucian trifoil cross is red and not some other symbolic color.

What can we conclude from this array of symbols that could be useful to our Rosicrucian practice? The whole of the right hand side of the illustration thus revolves around symbols relating to the red cloaked man and the woman veiled in white.

Symbolically, the red rose of completion can only be achieved when the white veil is drawn aside. The two urns, representing the vases of Hermes, have completed their task of containing the necessary elements of creation. These represent the dual nature contained within each of us. Once parted, because the sublimation of the contents is complete, they reveal the penultimate stage of the transformative process. Maria, personifying the wisdom of times past, points to what is now evident, that in each human, regardless of their gender, there exists an aspect of the opposite. These two must be brought into harmonious balance when they can then complement each other forming a complete and harmonious whole. Once in this state, each individual can accomplish all that they desire. Achieving this blissful state is symbolic of having the Stone of the Philosophers in one’s grasp. This was the aim of the symbolical alchemists of times past and it is the aim of Rosicrucians today.

Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*

Peter Bindon, FRC

In this article, Peter Bindon presents some of the fascinating symbolism and history behind Emblem 21 in Michael Maier's intriguing work, Atalanta Fugiens.



In the second volume of *De Alchimia opuscula complura veterum philosophorum*, published in Frankfurt in 1550, an unknown Philosopher says: “Make a round circle of the man and woman, and draw out of it a quadrangle, and out of the quadrangle a triangle, make a round circle and thou shalt have the Stone of the Philosophers.” Our illustration demonstrates this statement, but appears as Emblem 21 in Michael Maier’s 1618 publication *Atalanta Fugiens*, in English “Atalanta Fleeing.” This title refers to the well-known Greek myth, but the myth is poorly integrated with the alchemical iconography so we will ignore the myth itself and concentrate on the illustration and accompanying text that apparently refers directly to the formula given about seventy years previously in *De Alchemia...* (known more familiarly as *Rosarium Philosophorum* or The Rosary of the Philosophers). Although it is illustrated with twenty fascinating woodcuts of alchemical and Rosicrucian interest, it does not depict the theme of our symbol. Michael Maier’s *Atalanta Fugiens* text accompanying this illustration repeats the quotation from *Rosarium Philosophorum*, and then presents a slightly elaborated version set to music. Maier thus provides us with a meditation in verse and melody that may be used as an inspiration for further contemplation. Recently published multi-media versions of “Atalanta Fugiens” supply recordings of the music for anyone interested. Let us however examine the engraving that accompanies Maier’s fugue twenty-one and try to interpret some of the many layers of meaning in this alchemical illustration.



Maier lived between 1568 and 1622, but published most of his work in the last decade of his life. He had been a physician and private secretary to the Emperor Rudolph II and probably assisted him in collecting items for his museum, one of the first known. Maier had visited England and it is likely that he was some kind of roving ambassador or perhaps a spy for his master in Prague. His publications cover a wide range of subjects and indicate that he had read many earlier books on alchemy and other subjects.

Adam McLean, a contemporary commentator on alchemy and on the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, points out that there are several useful ways in which modern readers can explore alchemy. Two of these are especially relevant to Rosicrucian students. First, alchemy can be seen as a way of grouping together potent archetypal symbols that students may use as a launching pad from which to begin meditative inner journeys. Second, it may be regarded as an early attempt to record in words and pictures a type of mysticism in which alchemical transformation is an allegory for mystical experiences, and perhaps of religious ideas. I plan to discuss the illustration using a combination of these two viewpoints.

There is no doubt that constantly in alchemical writings we meet images of transformation in which elements, liquids, and people are changed from a lesser to a supposedly greater form. What is not always obvious is that the process of transformation is a metaphor for a journey towards Godhead that is made by those who practice alchemical systems of knowledge. Despite the known capacity for such major change to occur on a spiritual level, anyone who attempts the chemical experiments suggested in alchemical texts must have their level of human arrogance reduced. Following the literal explanations of alchemy inevitably leads to continual failure and one will never transmute humble elements into noble gold. We must look beneath the surface of alchemical writings for their real meanings.

In our illustration, the Philosopher, emblematic of the reader, is busily scribing the final circle around his design, which is set out upon a wall, and one in poor repair. Let us assume that this is a suggestion that we may find some explanation of this illustration in the language of the craft of those who build walls. The wall should perhaps be interpreted as a symbol of separation dividing off the worldly realms from those of the spirit. An obvious example of this symbol is found in the walls that surround temples, in the fortress-like walls of medieval churches and the like. If not well maintained, cracks appear in this wall, which will ultimately collapse and permit a torrent of diabolical influences to enter. Our Philosopher works on the inner surface of the spiritual wall indicated by other buildings in the background. As his wall is in disrepair, we understand that the spiritual tablet on which he works remains imperfect. Open as it is to the heavens however, Cosmic influences may yet descend to effect repairs. By this symbol we become aware that there is potential for success in our esoteric exercise unlike the failure that accompanies a literal perspective on the task ahead.



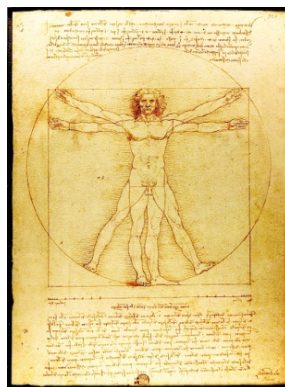
To reinforce this idea, Maier includes a symbol of the union of opposites on the manuscript lying on the ground behind the feet of the Philosopher. In a faint circle we see two interlinked triangles forming a hexagram. These may be symbolic of the alchemical conjunction of male and female that we will discuss later, but in the context of Neoplatonic ideas that influenced Maier, they are symbolic of the descent of the creative force of the Cosmic that formed the universe and the upward ascension of the creature towards the eternal.

The combination of the two triangles thus emphasizes the twofold process of ascending and descending that will culminate in our linking with Cosmic Consciousness.

In the Western Esoteric Tradition, the compasses held by the Philosopher are

used to measure and compare distances. They are usually emblematic of geometry and provide a visual link with Pythagorean mathematics. We also use compasses to construct a perfect circle, and thus they are regarded as symbols of exactness and indicate the necessity for adhering to the strict rules required in achieving one's goal. The large outer circle with its center is an allegory of the whole, circumscribing every part of creation. Traditionally the center of the circle is an allegory for the nature of God or as Rosicrucians say, of the Cosmic. In these symbols we are presented with the goal of our alchemical journey which is finding unity with the Cosmic.

Within the outer circle of our illustration lies a smaller circle containing drawings of a male and a female figure, unmistakable and potent symbols for the union of opposites. We are reminded of Adam and Eve, the primal couple of Creation to whom the biblical authors attributed the commencement of the human race. Let us imagine that these two figures amalgamate, the two forms interpenetrating one another until they form just one existence. Through their union, humanity manifests and begins the alchemical journey that will result in the reunification of individuals with the creative genius of the Cosmic. Maier's words accompanying the illustration describe this quest in the language of alchemy and in other writings he explains the process in the following way. The alchemical squaring of the circle consists in adding a cross, (lying at the Philosopher's feet), to a microcosmic sphere which is then converted into a square (the four elements), then into a triangle (body, spirit and soul). The triangle finally transforms into the great sphere of the macrocosmic, called the Philosopher's Stone.



For the alchemists there was nothing strange about the squaring of the circle. They used the square derived from the circle to demonstrate that every simple body contained the four elements. How can this be? Imagine the rose at the intersection of the arms of a Rose Cross growing outward until the outer circle of petals reaches the ends of the arms. Use the arms of the cross to divide the circle

evenly into four segments. A builder's square, forming one fourth of a circle, lies at the base of the wall hinting that our interpretations seem correct. Now separate the circular rose into its four segments and rearrange these to form a square that surrounds a circle (formed by the edge of the quartered rose). Collecting the four segments and stacking each segment one on the other combines the four elements into a more or less triangular shape, which now represents the four elements making up the human body. By the transformation of the square into this triangle the alchemists taught that one should bring forth spirit, body, and soul, which appear briefly in their symbolic colors before re-combining into a glowing red sphere (the rose). The body (earth) is assigned the black color of Saturn, to the spirit (water) is given the whiteness of the moon, and to the soul (air) the pale yellow of the Sun. As the triangle has now attained its highest perfection, it must in its turn change into a circle, colored red like the everlasting fire of the fourth element. Becoming now spherical the final result of the alchemist's efforts, the "soul of the substances," is transmuted into the gold of the Philosopher's Stone.

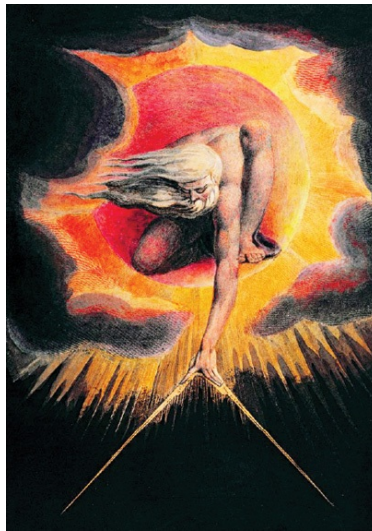
Using the segment of the circle or protractor at the foot of the wall the philosopher has been checking the drawings on the plans that lie behind him. The segment of a circle is an early form of square, familiar to builders, carpenters, bookbinders, and many other craftspeople. Now philosophically, the square is the equivalent of matter, while the compasses are symbols of the spirit and of its power over matter. By operating with spiritual and material forces the Philosopher suggests that we need to balance these two aspects of existence.

In this case, matter is symbolized by the male figure and spirit, the Biblical breath of God by the female figure. Throughout the transformative operation that has been described, the woman returns into the man (reversing the Biblical imagery), the two individuals becoming a single entity.

It is fascinating to realize that the alchemists of the late Middle Ages understood the necessity for humans to reconcile the two aspects, male and female, contained in every individual. People who acknowledge that their personality is composed of attributes that can be seen as either feminine or masculine, and come to accept these characteristics are made more whole and balanced in their personality. Individuals who have battled with finding their real psychic identity find that they can achieve a new outlook on life after they accept the gifts wrapped in the guise of the opposite gender.

You may wish to ponder further the imagery of our illustration in the light of two other illuminating artworks. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) made an interesting drawing of a male human figure circumscribed by a circle and

enclosed in a square. While this is superficially interpreted as a study in proportions of the human figure, other interpretations are possible. This is especially so as it is known that Leonardo was familiar with occult writings including the strange mixture of Christian ideals and pagan thought known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). A related drawing by William Blake (1757-1827), “The Ancient of Days Measuring Time” depicts him seated on the solar disk and stretching a vast pair of compasses earthwards. In the sense used by these two artists and by the Kabbalists, compasses have been interpreted as images of thought being capable of constructing the many concentric circles of the theoretical world. Readers will be familiar with the many Rosicrucian, Kabbalistic, and alchemical images of the world that make use of this symbolism found in the publication *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians of the 16th and 17th Centuries*.



Robert Fludd's Rose and Cross

Peter Bindon, FRC

In this article, Peter Bindon explores Robert Fludd's Rose and Cross image from the work Summum Bonum (published in 1629), one of several texts that Fludd wrote in defense of the Rosicrucians.

There is some debate about the connection between Robert Fludd and the Brethren of the Rosy Cross, as Rosicrucians were known 350 years ago. However it is very clear from both his writings and what others wrote about him that Fludd was greatly conversant with the principles of Rosicrucians. His Rose and Cross image is full of symbolism relating to Rosicrucian thinking.

Fludd was born in 1574 and died in 1637. Although he lived and worked at medicine most of his time in England, he also traveled in Europe and most likely associated with like-minded individuals during his six years there. He became a Bachelor and later a Doctor in Medicine at Oxford University. However, he was considered unorthodox because he consulted each patient's horoscope in diagnosis and he used what seemed like homeopathic remedies. Fludd was what one today would call a holistic healer. He maintained that the mind and the spirit of the patient must be healed first and any disease second. Fludd's radical ideas about medicine and cures caused him great difficulties in becoming accepted by the medical community but eventually he was admitted as a Fellow in the Royal College of Physicians. His book, *A Compendious Apology for the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross...* published in 1617 shows that he was a most enthusiastic supporter of The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross but he never claimed that he was a member of that group. Of course this is no surprise because at that time it was dangerous to one's own health to claim to be anything other than a very orthodox citizen! Robert Fludd's Rose and Cross first appeared as an illustration in his *Summum Bonum* Part 4 published in 1629, another defense of the Rosicrucian Fraternity. The Latin inscription means: The Rose Gives Honey to Bees. This is a perfectly innocent observation, but why would Fludd say something so obvious? It has been suggested that there is a lot more here than Fludd says.

Let us examine some of the symbolism in this drawing.



Robert Fludd's Rose and Cross. *Dat Rosa Mel Apibus*. Hand-painted mural in the Rosicrucian Cultural Center of New York City, Harlem, New York. Photo by Leo Adams, FRC.

The language of the Rose has filled whole books and is too extensive to be discussed here. We may observe however, that the rose is associated with love, and this virtue is central to Rosicrucian symbolism. First, Love, along with Light and Life, occupies one of the points of the Triangle of Manifestation mentioned in Rosicrucian rituals. Second, we are advised to “Love one another,” in the words that Christ used, so that our soul personality might unfold as do the petals of a rose advancing to maturity. Third, the mystic rose representing the soul personality unfolds on the cross of service in our most potent and easily recognized symbol, that of the Rose Cross of those content to labor at their personal growth. The rose stands in the garden of the soul. The bees of course are symbolic of labor. Imagine the combined effort of the individual insects that is necessary to condense one liter of honey from the nectar of thousands of flowers. The labor of the alchemists and healers was no less intense. For us this symbol indicates that progress in mystical development does not take place without considerable personal effort. The Light of Rosicrucianism carried by our Rosicrucian Groups is likewise the combination of many tiny lights. This was another illustration related to the symbolism of the bees in their hive. Bees are necessary in a garden to ensure that the potential fertility of the plants is manifested in their fruits. Unless the flowers receive the attention of some pollinating mechanism, they wither and die unfulfilled. Bees are the eternal symbol of the natural progression of life, even in our less than poetic language, where reproduction is often coyly referred to as an activity for “The Birds and Bees.”

The trellis and vines in Fludd's illustration remind us that we are in a garden. The “Wine of the Grape” has long been a symbol of the rich rewards that enterprise can bring. In this instance it is also reminiscent of a transformative

function, because many separate processes are required to transform the grape on the vine into the wine which nourishes the soul. Again we recall that labor is required to make the garden productive. The wave-like aspect to the surface of the garden can simply be thought of as representing what we say even today are “the ups and downs of life.” We understand that every single moment may not be experienced at the moment as something pleasurable, but despite the adversities we encounter, the evolution of our soul personality proceeds all the more rapidly because of the resolution and fortitude we exhibit.

The spider is symbolic of the pitfalls that must be avoided in life. Just as the web catches the unwary bee, so distraction, lack of focus, indolence, and other vices catch the imprudent gardener of the soul. Robert Fludd has provided us with a number of linked symbols in this illustration. He has artfully camouflaged the fact that the rose itself is carried on a cross. The arms of the cross are formed by stumpy branches, the likes of which are not seen on actual plants. To avoid any mistake in interpretation, Fludd’s cross is intentionally remote from the cross of crucifixion adopted by the Christian church. We are thus not to confuse this cross with one of religious symbolism. Although there may be parallels between the two kinds of crosses, Fludd’s brings us directly to contemplate the idea of the cross of service on which unfolds the rose of the developing soul personality.

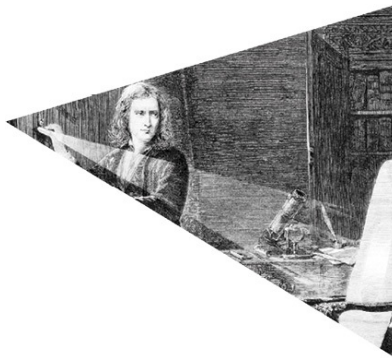
Sir Isaac Newton - Mystic and Alchemist

Staff of the Rosicrucian Research Library

Many people are familiar with Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727)—one of the most extraordinary scientists and mathematicians in the history of humanity. In this article, the Staff of the Rosicrucian Research Library introduces us to Sir Isaac Newton—passionate mystic and the world’s most famous Alchemist.

Isaac Newton’s amazing genius continues to significantly influence our lives today. His discoveries regarding the Laws of Motion and the Law of Universal Gravity literally changed the way humans view the world around us and formed the basis for modern physics. He built the first practical reflector telescope and using a prism, also proved that white light is made up of a spectrum of light (colors mixed together), rather than being a separate color itself, as previously believed. His *Method of Fluxions* became the foundation for differential calculus, which is applied extensively in many fields today, from designing factories to determining the rate of a chemical reaction.

Isaac Newton grew up on a farm in rural England. As a boy, he completely immersed himself in the study and application of a book entitled *The Mysteries of Nature and Art*, building various mechanical devices and discovering other ways to investigate the world around him. Later, when he was a student at the University of Cambridge, the Great Plague of London (1665-1667) broke out and all the students were sent home. Newton returned to the farm where he continued his passionate exploration of the natural world. This period of study and reflection and later time spent on his farm were immensely fruitful for Newton, providing insights into some of his most important discoveries.



While a great deal of information has been widely available regarding other aspects of Isaac Newton's life and work, until recently very little was generally known regarding his deep passion for mysticism and Alchemy, even though he wrote more than one million words on the subject! Rosicrucians, however, have been aware of Sir Isaac Newton's mystical interests for centuries.

At the time of his death, Isaac Newton's personal library contained around 1,800 volumes, including 169 books on the topic of alchemy. His was considered one of the most important alchemical libraries in the world. His collection also included a thoroughly annotated personal copy of *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity Rosie Cross*, by Thomas Vaughan—the English translation of the Rosicrucian Manifestos. He also possessed copies of *Themis Aurea* (*Themis Aurea: The Laws of the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross*) and *Symbola Aurea Mensae Duodecim Nationum*, important books related to Rosicrucianism, written by the Rosicrucian defender and Alchemist, Michael Maier. These books were all extensively annotated by Newton.

Isaac Newton chose to keep his mystical interests secret. There would have been many good reasons for doing so during the age in which he lived. At that time, the English Crown had outlawed certain Alchemical practices, for example, creating gold through alchemical processes, because they feared that it might devalue the British currency. The penalty for this crime was death by hanging. Newton also faced certain scrutiny from his peers within the scientific community. Newton was repeatedly challenged throughout his lifetime regarding his theories and these confrontations deeply disturbed him.

Newton also felt that he was protecting humanity from those who might misuse alchemical knowledge. In a letter to fellow Alchemist Robert Boyle, one of the leading intellectual figures of the seventeenth century and largely regarded today as the first modern Chemist, Newton urged Boyle to keep “high silence” in discussing the principles of Alchemy publicly. He wrote that these principles “may possibly be an inlet to something more noble that is not to be communicated without immense damage to the world...There are other things besides the transmutation of metals which none but they [the Hermetic writers] understand.”¹

Even after his Alchemical manuscripts were discovered after his death, they were misunderstood. Although Newton served as the President of the Royal Society for twenty-four years, following his death in 1727, they decided that his papers on Alchemy were “not fit to be printed.” They remained largely unknown for the next 200 years.

Fortunately many of his previously unavailable manuscripts were donated to

King's College Library at the University of Cambridge in 1946, as a bequest from the British economist John Maynard Keynes, who had purchased them from one of Newton's relatives in 1936. These texts include Newton's extensive notes and diagrams related to his alchemical research and experiments over several decades. Many of them include alchemical code, such as alchemical symbols (for example, ☾, symbolizing silver, Monday, and the Moon), alchemical phrases (such as "the Green Lion," which typically represents the essence of a metal or the raw forces of nature), and using ancient mythology to describe alchemical processes (for example, in the language of Alchemy, the deities Venus, Mars, and Vulcan represent copper, iron, and fire).

Jed Buchwald, with the California Institute of Technology, states, "There was a profound element to the practice of alchemy which really makes it deserving of being called early modern chemistry. Newton's not a madman playing around with strange spirituous substances, he's trying to actually figure out how to change material particles around to get one thing out of something else. And that's not so weird."²

In his text entitled, "Newton, the Man," Keynes, a great admirer of Newton and well-acquainted with his work, states:

There are an unusual number of manuscripts of the early English alchemists in the libraries of Cambridge. It may be that there was some continuous esoteric tradition within the University which sprang into activity again in the twenty years from 1650 to 1670. At any rate, Newton was clearly an unbridled addict. It is this with which he occupied "about 6 weeks at spring and 6 at the fall when the fire in the laboratory scarcely went out" at the very years when he was composing the *Principia*—and about which he told Humphrey Newton [his assistant] not a word. Moreover, he was almost entirely concerned, not in serious experiment, but in trying to read the riddle of tradition, to find meaning in cryptic verses, to imitate the alleged but largely imaginary experiments of the initiates of past centuries.³

Michael White writes in *Isaac Newton, The Last Sorcerer*, "Like all European alchemists from the Dark Ages to the beginning of the scientific era and beyond, Newton was motivated by a deep-rooted commitment to the notion that alchemical wisdom extended back to ancient times. The Hermetic tradition—the body of alchemical knowledge—was believed to have originated in the mists of time and to have been given to humanity through supernatural agents."⁴

In "Newton's Alchemy," Karin Figala, writes, "His alchemy cannot be seen solely in connection with his chemical experiments but was also a link between

his religious beliefs and his scientific aims.”⁵ Like the Pythagoreans more than two millennia before him, Newton studied how the universe worked in order to feel a closer connection with the Divine. Newton wrote, “The most beautiful system of the Sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being.”⁶ Dennis Hauck points out, “Newton was fascinated with light because he thought it embodied the Word of God, as suggested by the Emerald Tablet.”⁷



One of the most intriguing Alchemical texts found in Newton’s papers is his translation of the Emerald Tablet (*Tabula Smaragdina*). The oldest known version of this text, written in Arabic, dates to the sixth century. Rosicrucian Tradition attributes it to Apollonius of Tyana, a philosopher and thaumaturgist of the first century. In the earliest text, Apollonius describes how he discovered the tomb of Hermes: “He claims to have found in this sepulcher an old man, seated on a throne, holding an emerald-colored tablet upon which appeared the text of the famed *Emerald Tablet*. Before him was a book explaining the secrets of the creation of beings and the knowledge of the causes for all things. This narrative would recur much later in the *Fama Fraternitatis*.”⁸

The text below is Isaac Newton, the Alchemist’s, commentary on the Emerald Tablet, translated here for the first time from Latin.⁹

Those things that follow are most true. Inferior and superior, fixed and volatile, sulphur and quicksilver have a similar nature and are one thing, as a husband and wife. For they differ from one another only by degree of digestion and maturity. Sulphur is mature quicksilver, and quicksilver is immature sulphur: and because of this affinity they unite like male and female, and they act on each other, and through that action they are mutually transmuted into each other and procreate a more noble offspring to accomplish the miracles of this one thing.

And just as all things were created from one Chaos by the design of one God, so in our art all things, that is, the four elements, are born from this one thing which is our Chaos, by the design of the Artificer and the skillful

adaptation of things. And the generation of this is similar to the human, no less than from a father and mother, which are the Sun and the ☾ .

And when through this intercourse a human child is born, it gestates in the womb of the dragon's breath. In the leafy earth until the hour of its birth and after its birth it is nourished at the breast until it grows older. This breath is its bath. Of the Sun and the Moon... Mercury, ...the dragon and fire which succeeds in the third place to govern the Work. And the nurse is the purified Latona, who has arrived and is cleansed until, on behalf of Apollo and Diana in Egypt, it has a nurse tintured white and red.

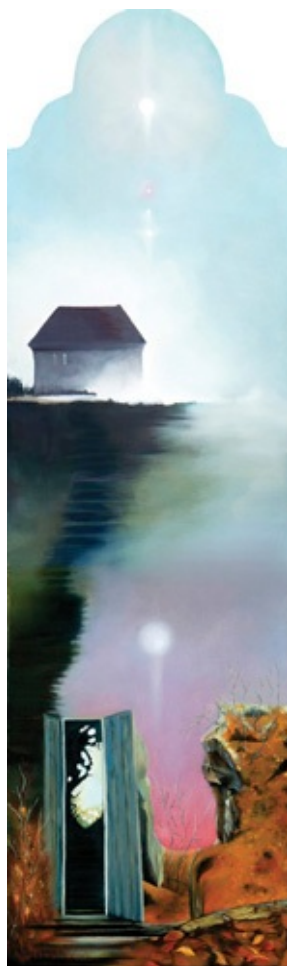
This Fountain of all perfection is the whole world. Its Power and Effectiveness is complete and perfect if it is changed into fixed earth by decoction and reddening and multiplication. But first it must gently and gradually be purified by separating the elements without violence, so that the whole matter ascends into heaven, and through repeated distillations descends to earth. Through which means it acquires both the penetrating power of spirit and the fixed power of a body.

In this way you will have the glory of the whole world and all darkness will flee from you, and all poverty and sickness. For this thing, when through dissolving and coagulation ascends to heaven and descends to earth, most powerful, evades all things. For it will overcome and coagulate every subtle thing and will penetrate every solid thing, and it moistens all.

And in whatsoever way the world has been made from the dark Chaos through the production of light and the separation of the waters of the firmament of the air from those of earth, so our work was created from the black Chaos and its prime matter through a separation of the elements and their illumination, and leads to the origin of matter.

Whereby arise adaptations and marvelous arrangements in our work, the mode of which is concealed within the creation of this world.

On account of this art Mercury is called thrice greatest, having three parts of the philosophy of the whole world, since he signifies the Mercury of the philosophers, which has and is made up of the three most powerful substances, body, soul, and spirit and has dominion in the mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, and the animal kingdom.



Victoria Franck Wetsch, SRC, *As Above, So Below*.

ENDNOTES

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Spiritual Alchemy

Christian Bernard, FRC

In this article, Christian Bernard, Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, inspires us to participate in the Great Work on ourselves, through the transformative power of Spiritual Alchemy.



If there is really one essential thing for mystics in general and Rosicrucians in particular, it is spiritual alchemy. This form of alchemy amounts to one of the foundations of philosophy, and sets out the path we must follow in order to fulfill our inner evolution. Herein, indeed, lies the Great Work that each human being must accomplish in order to discover the Philosopher's Stone that is to be found in the deepest part of themselves, and achieve the perfection of their own nature.

Material alchemy, also called "operative alchemy," has for centuries fascinated scientists and mystics too, but what is essential must remain for us the transmuting, the perfecting, and hence the evolving of our inner being. Whereas operative alchemy transmutes base metals into gold, spiritual alchemy transforms our soul. Before moving on to the latter, I would like to go over what comprises material alchemy.

Generally speaking, its aim was to transmute base metals, usually lead or tin, into gold. This transmutation was not, however, carried out directly upon the metal in question, but on a *materia prima*, that is to say on a primary or raw material, referred to as the "stone material" in some alchemical writings. It is difficult to say exactly what this *materia prima* was, because the descriptions given of it are confused, and they vary from author to author. According to certain sources it consisted of a naturally-occurring ore, composed essentially of sulphur, salt, and mercury combined in precise proportions. It would seem that this ore was rare and could be found only in places known to the alchemists, which they kept a most closely-guarded secret.

Having obtained the *materia prima*, the alchemists would place it in a container to which they gave the name of "philosophical egg," partly because of its oval shape, and partly to echo their belief that the whole of Creation arose from a universal "egg," within which it existed in a latent, or seed, state. From here they put the *materia prima* through several consecutive stages.

In the course of these stages, the *materia prima* took on various colors, until it

appeared as a red magma. Upon cooling, this magma gave rise to a somewhat bulky stone of the same color: the Philosopher's Stone. This is the reason that transmutation aimed at obtaining gold was called "the red work." The process aimed at making silver, usually out of iron, was designated by the name "the white work," and also consisted of several stages.

The final stage of the Great Work was to reduce the Philosopher's Stone to a perfectly homogenous powder. Once this powder was obtained, the alchemist would cast it into the molten base metal, which on contact would gradually transform itself into gold.

This was the basic principle of material alchemy. We also need to be aware that it was practiced according to two methods. The first, designated the "damp method," gave precedence to the processes of dissolving and distilling. It lasted several weeks or even months, and required the use of retorts and stills. The second was called the "dry method" and favored the processes of heating and combustion, mainly involving the use of ovens and crucibles. This second method was the quicker of the two, but also the more dangerous, involving as it did the risk of explosions. It did sometimes happen that alchemists would get injured in the practice of their art or, even worse, would get killed.

We know that the alchemists worked in special laboratories which were used for nothing else. Most often this was a cellar, an attic, or other building that was not well lit, as most of the necessary operations could not be carried out in daylight. The adepts also made use of various accessories. As well as the retorts, stills, ovens, and crucibles referred to, they also used scales, different sorts of pincers, pestles, bellows of various sizes, and even musical instruments.

The main furnace, called the athanor, was generally crude in shape and usually made of fireproof earth. For different situations, its fire would be provided by wood, charcoal, or sometimes even oil, allowing better control of its intensity during the most delicate procedures.

If you are wondering why the alchemists used musical instruments during their work, it was because by playing certain notes or combinations of notes, they produced vibrations which had a specific effect on one phase or another of the Great Work. From what we know, they mainly used string instruments such as the violin and guitar. Sometimes they used wind instruments though, such as the trumpet or a small organ. It is also likely that they intoned vowel sounds, although we have no proof of this. This was certainly the case with the Rosicrucian alchemists. The purpose of this was one and the same, to create vibratory conditions favorable for this or that procedure. We can also assume that at times it was to raise themselves to the state of consciousness required for

their work.

In the case of the red work and the white work alike, the alchemists did their work by day or night, depending on the operation they had to carry out. While they always worked in a dimly-lit room, they thought that certain stages had to take place when the Sun was in a certain position in the sky, or when the moon was in a certain phase of its cycle.

It is also known that they attached great importance to eclipses, believing that they had a particular influence on alchemical procedures. They considered this influence to be either negative or positive in different situations, which then governed what they did. There is no doubt at all that alchemy drew on both astronomy and astrology. It is certainly not mere chance that the alchemists held there to be a precise correlation between the metals and the planets of our solar system. They also had a good knowledge of chemistry.

The question we may ask ourselves is whether the alchemists really succeeded in making gold. Judging from the accounts they have left us, there is no doubt whatsoever about this. Many authors too state that this was the means by which Jacques Coeur, Jean Bourré, Nicolas Flamel, and Cagliostro—to name just the most well-known—acquired their wealth. If we accept this as true, it is of note that these individuals were known for their generosity and altruism, which suggests that they were practicing their art in order to help the poorest in society and to pay for projects for the common good, such as hospitals, roads, bridges, and so on. Apart from these testimonies, however, we do not have absolute proof that the adepts of the Great Work really managed to achieve their goal or became wealthy by this means. We must each therefore form our own view on this point.

To know whether the alchemists of the past succeeded in transmuting base metals into gold is incidental. The most important thing is the fact that they were convinced that human beings have the power, not to take the place of nature, but to emulate it. In accordance with this conviction, they studied the laws of nature with the greatest respect. What is more, most of them were deeply spiritual, and used alchemy as an aid to their mystic quest. This is why their laboratories always included an oratory, meaning a place set aside for prayer, meditation, and for the study of divine laws generally. Usually the oratory consisted simply of a chair and a table with candles, objects for rituals, and esoteric books.

Material alchemy was just the outward expression of an infinitely higher transmutation, that of the soul itself; the cornerstone of this transmutation is, purely and simply, spiritual alchemy. This mystic process consists in one transmuting one's faults by means of the crucible of life, urged on by the divine fire which burns within us. We are all imperfect, however the ultimate goal of

our evolution is to attain that state of perfection which Rosicrucians call the “Rose-Croix state.” This state can only come about, though, when we have purified our personality of its negative shortcomings; this entails awakening the virtues of the divine soul which is within us and which is seeking only to express its capacity for wisdom. But such a goal cannot be attained in one single lifetime, therefore we have to reincarnate for as long as we are imperfect.



The Alchemist. H. Spencer Lewis, FRC.

To the extent that one has not awakened the virtues of one’s divine soul, one manifests certain faults such as pride, selfishness, jealousy, intolerance, and so on. In return these same faults are detrimental to the person, for they generate negative karma which is expressed as trials of varying degrees in one’s life. We therefore have at least two good reasons for perfecting ourselves: first, it is part of the process of evolution from which we cannot withdraw, whose ultimate goal is to attain perfection, such as we can demonstrate it as human beings; second, it allows us to “think” our behavior into being positive, and create positive karma for ourselves, which is expressed in our lives as joy in various forms, and is conducive to the happiness we are seeking. Surely what we ultimately want, after all, is to have as happy an existence as possible and to gain mastery of life.

There are several stages required to reach the sought-after goal in spiritual alchemy, just as with material alchemy. The first consists in accepting the idea that we are imperfect and have faults to correct. When I say “accept,” this means our own view as much as that of others. This involves both looking at ourselves as we are, in the mirror of our soul, and also paying attention to the image of ourselves that others send back to us. If we do not do this, we end up becoming blind to our real personality and give even more power to our faults, to the point where they generate negative conduct on our part and give rise to corresponding karmic tests.

If reading this article is interesting to you, it is probably because you started this spiritual alchemy at the same time as you did your personal mystic quest. There is no question that if your experience of life has endowed you with a modicum of wisdom, it will also have brought you clarity of thought. You are therefore in a position to know and to recognize your weaknesses, and I am positive that you have within you the potential to transmute these. I can assure you for my part that I am well aware of my faults, deficiencies, and mistakes, and I am certainly endeavoring to improve myself. It is not from a position of detachment, therefore, that I am passing on my reflections to you, but rather as a human being to whom this alchemy also applies. If it is always easier to speak about good than to do good, the same can be said for the work and the betterment that we call for in others.

But accepting the concept of having faults is not enough to accomplish this inner transmutation. We must also want to correct them, and this constitutes a key stage in spiritual alchemy. In other words, we must have the resolve to become better, in the human sense. This is only possible if we truly have the conviction that humankind's goal is to evolve, which presents the whole question of the real meaning we attribute to life.

For my part I am convinced that anyone who strives to perfect themselves receives the support of the God of their heart and can find happiness, even if their faults are relatively numerous. If this is true, it is because karmic law always rewards any effort made in the same direction as the Good. Conversely, any person who has few faults but who lets themselves be controlled by them without ever striving to transmute them, attracts various problems and progressive trials to themselves for as long as they take pleasure in their weaknesses.



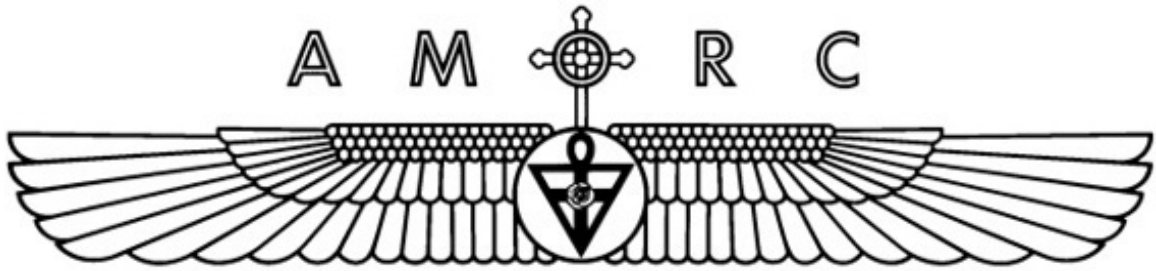
Once the decision to perfect oneself is taken, there comes another stage in

spiritual alchemy. This consists in materializing our desire to become better by actually transmuting our faults. But to manage to do this, above anything else we must not attempt to fight against them, this unfortunately being our tendency. Fighting them like this in fact contributes to accentuating our faults, because our ego then uses this to give itself power and assert its hold over our conduct. On the contrary, we should disengage from the fault in question, and work on ourselves to acquire the opposite quality. To take an example, if a person is fundamentally overly proud and is aware of this, they should not try to fight against their pride, for in so doing they give it even more force and increase its ability to be harmful. They should endeavor to acquire the opposite quality, in this case, humility. This entails calling on the most divine within their nature.

But how do we acquire the opposite quality of a fault we are aware of? It seems to me that the best way of achieving this is to first define the manner in which the quality expresses itself in everyday life. Having done this, we should make ourselves manifest it every time there is occasion to do so, until it is an integral part of our soul and becomes natural. Returning to the example of pride, anyone wanting to rid themselves of this fault needs to implement humility. How exactly? By making themselves stop highlighting their merits, demonstrating their intellectual or any other type of superiority, or seeking to draw attention to themselves, and making themselves act in the service of Good in a totally impersonal way, and so forth. With time, this determined effort to be humble ends up becoming habitual, in other words, it becomes a law to the subconscious. Pride is then transmuted. This is the basic principle of the spiritual alchemy we should apply to each of our faults.

A mystic who has transmuted all of his or her faults into their opposite qualities then experiences the final stage of spiritual alchemy, Illumination. If not perfect, then he or she is at least very close to the state of perfection, to the degree that it can be expressed by human beings on Earth. The *materia prima* of their being, their soul, has then become pure and perfect. It is not just chance that the Rosicrucian alchemists symbolized the Great Work by a red rose, often with an aura of the color gold. Certainly, whoever has attained this state has brought about the celebrated “Chymical Wedding.” In other words, they have accomplished the union between their human Self and their divine Self, symbolized in the language of alchemy by the marriage of the king and the queen, and by the union of sulphur and mercury. From that point on, they truly possess the elixir of long life, for they have become a pure agent of the Divinity, and are no longer obliged to reincarnate.

In your mind, in your heart, and in your life, may alchemy take place!



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